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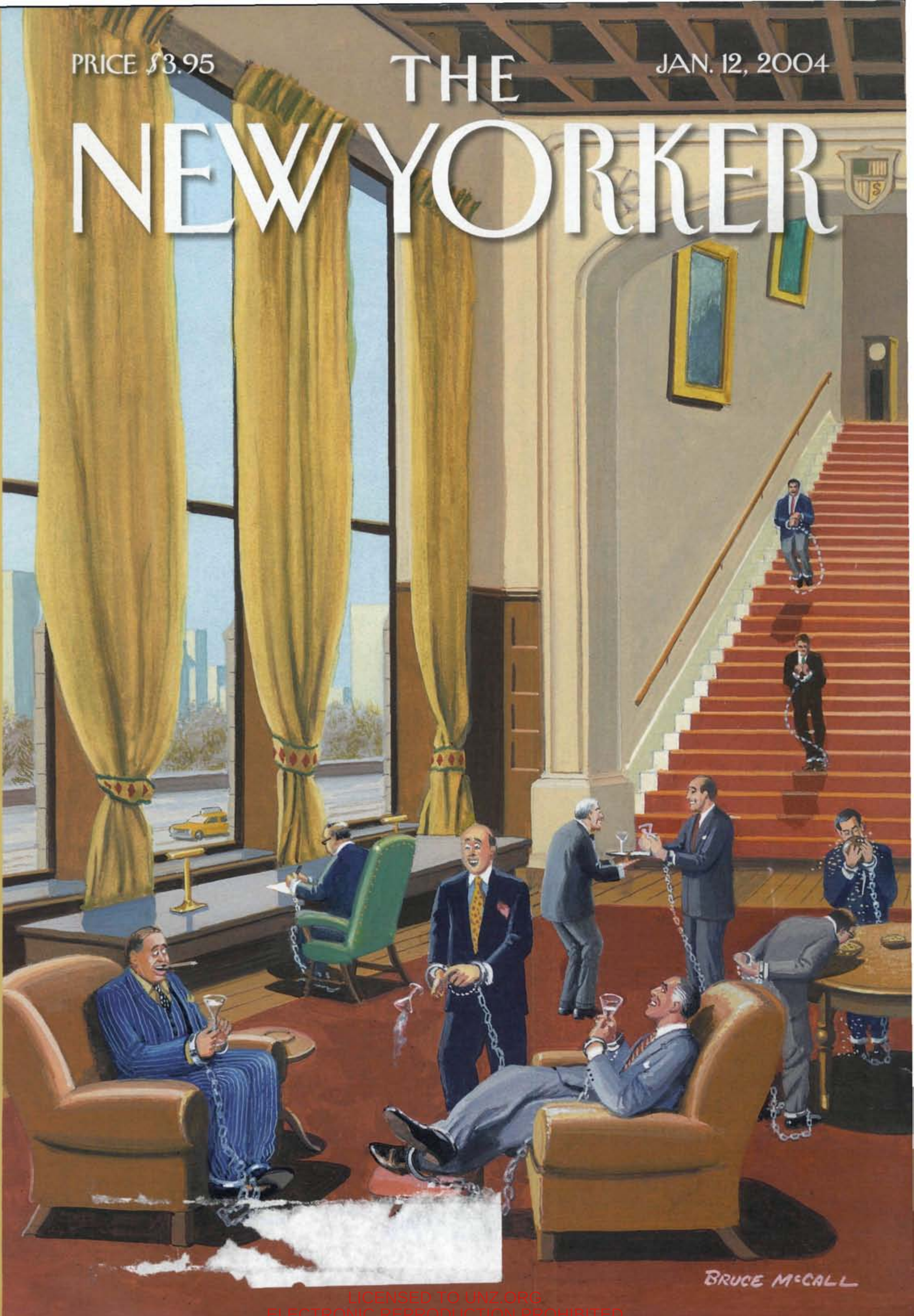
JAN. 12, 2004



BRUCE McCALL

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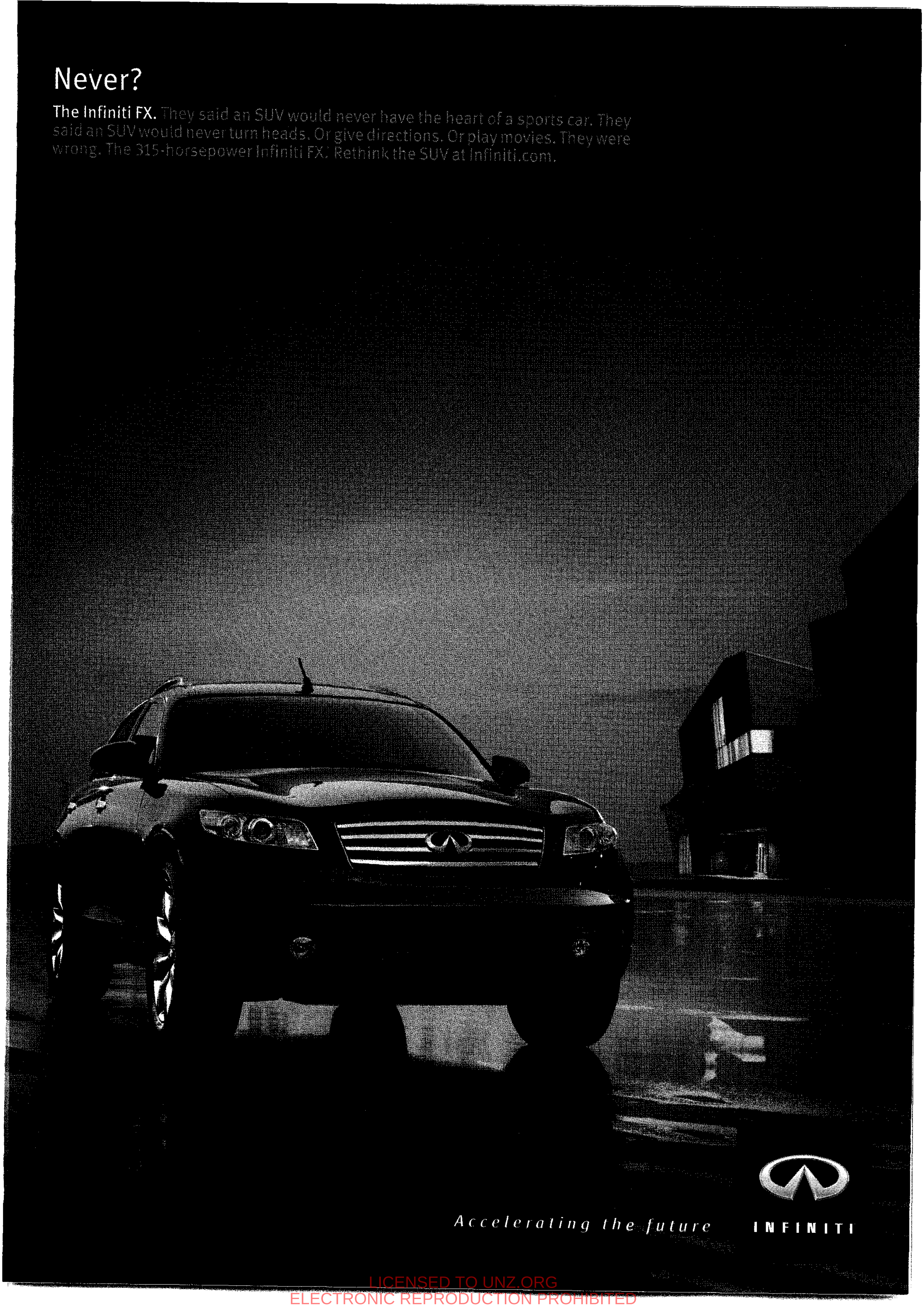

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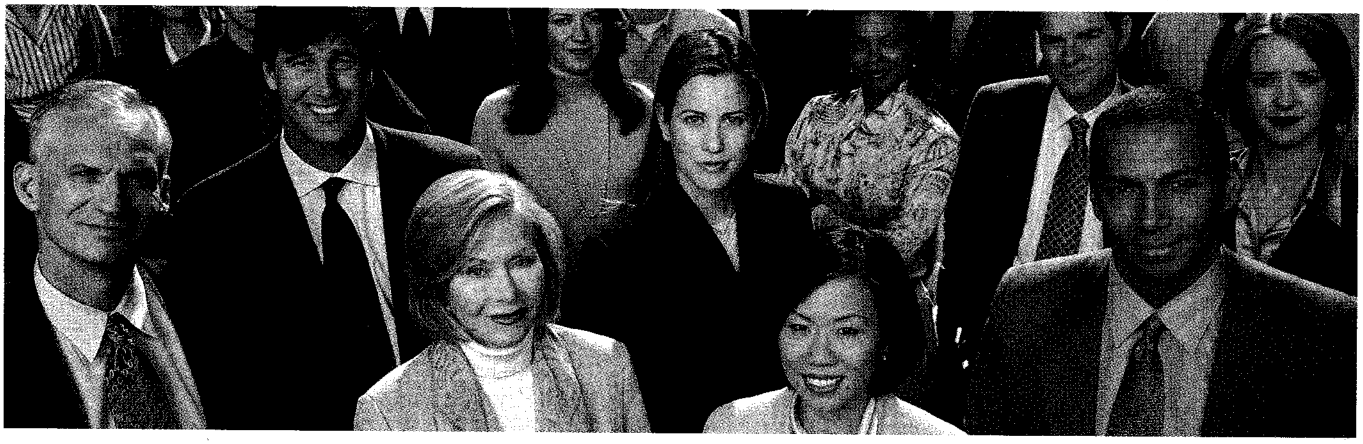

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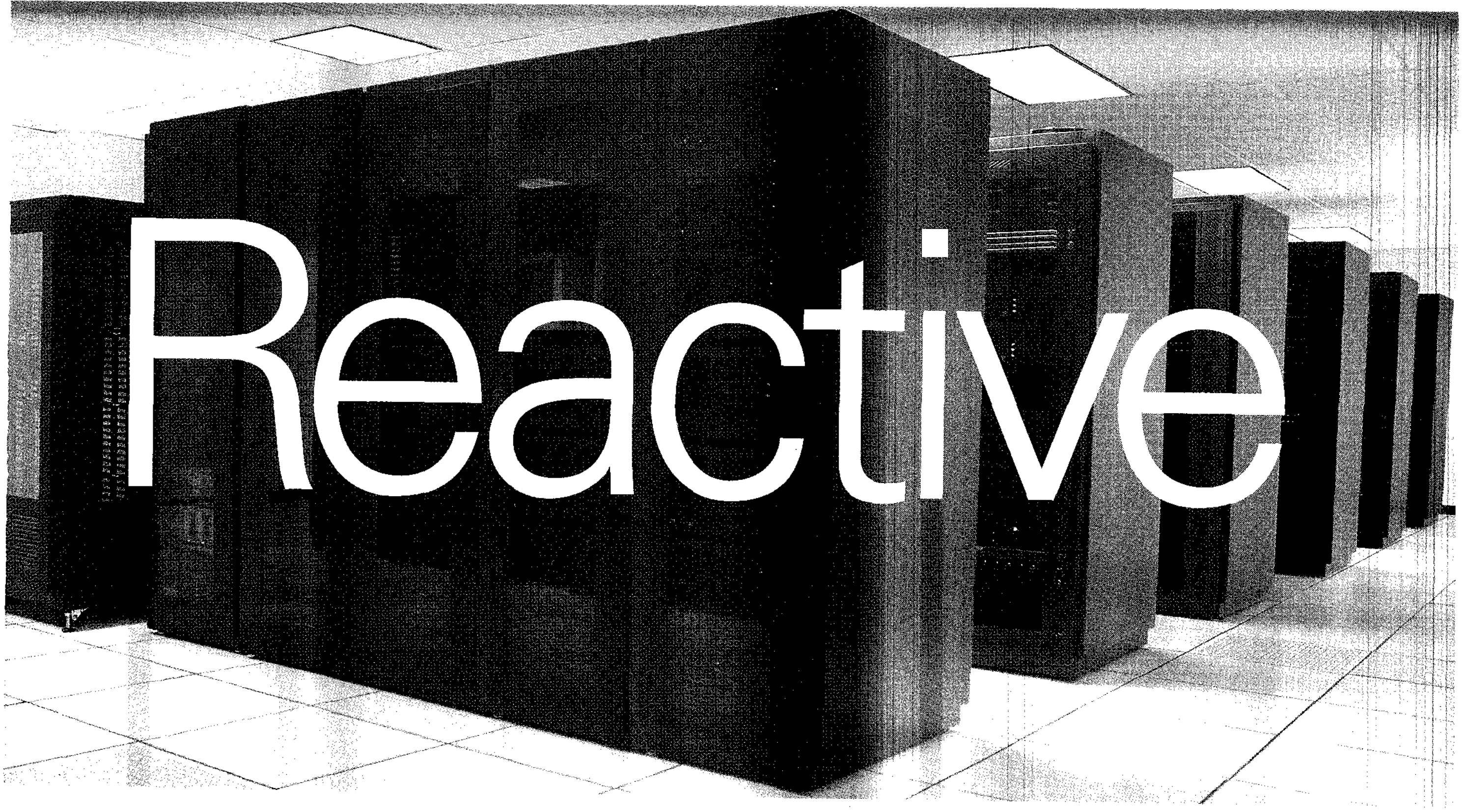

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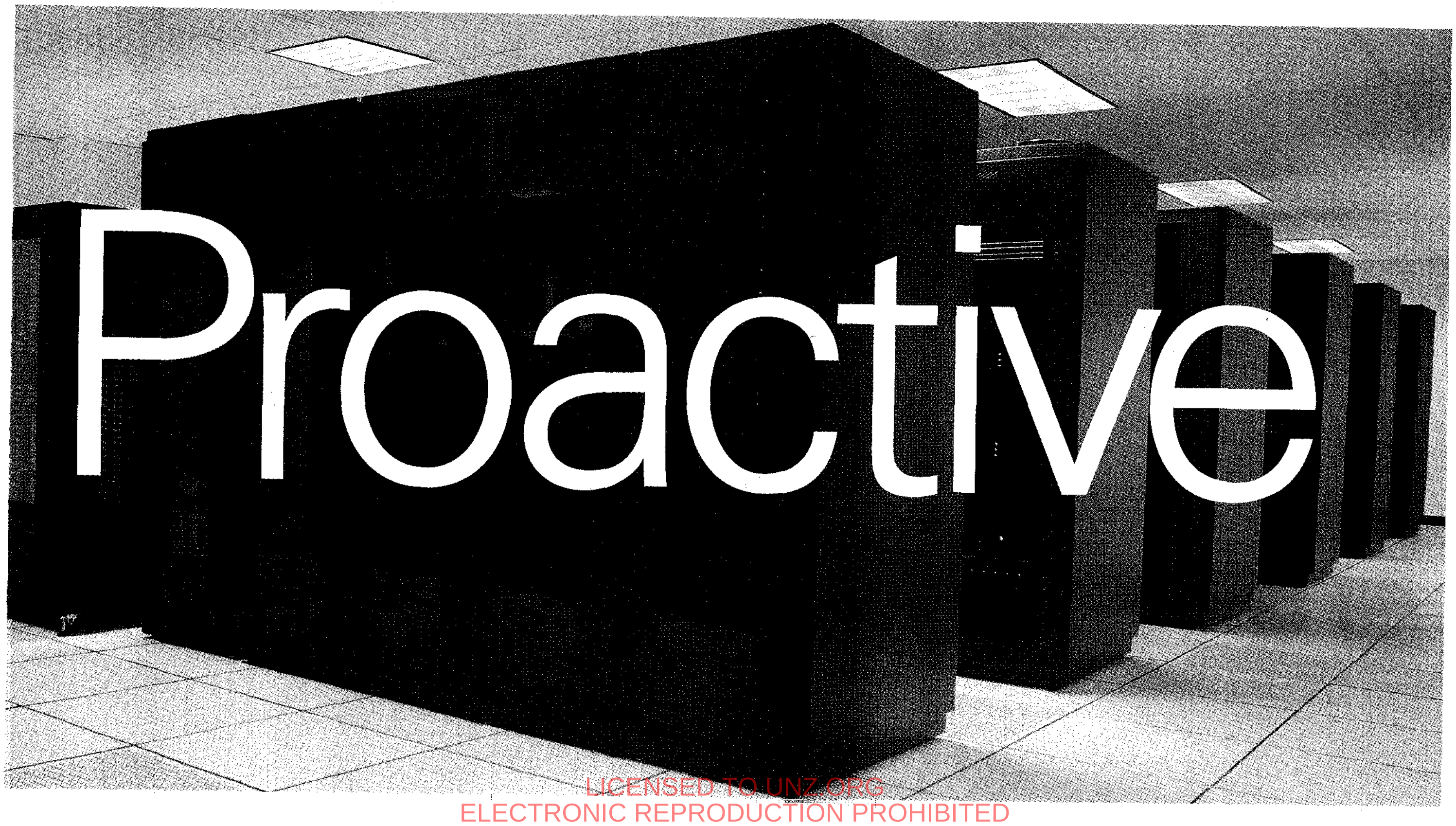

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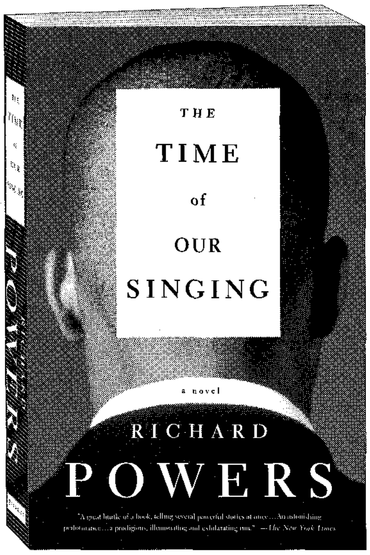

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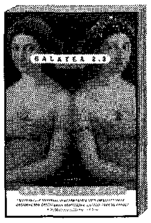

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CONTRIBUTORS

Mark Singer ("Running on Instinct," p. 42) has been a staff writer since 1974. He has a new book, "Somewhere in America," coming out in June.

Malcolm Gladwell ("Big and Bad," p. 28) is the author of "The Tipping Point."

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 27) writes a regular column on business and finance. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" will be published this spring.

David Owen (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 41) is a staff writer and the author of, most recently, "The First National Bank of Dad" and "Hit & Hope: How the Rest of Us Play Golf."

Wislawa Szymborska (Poem, p. 44) won the 1996 Nobel Prize in Literature. "Nonrequired Reading," a collection of her prose pieces, was published in 2002.

Ian Frazier ("Bags in Trees: A Retrospective," p. 60) is a longtime contributor. A collection of his *New Yorker* reporting pieces, "Nobody Better, Better Than Nobody," was reissued in paperback last fall.

Atul Gawande ("The Mop-Up," p. 34) is assistant professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School. His book "Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science" is available in paperback.

Chang-rae Lee (Fiction, p. 66) has published two novels, "Native Speaker" and "A Gesture Life." His third, "Aloft," comes out in March.

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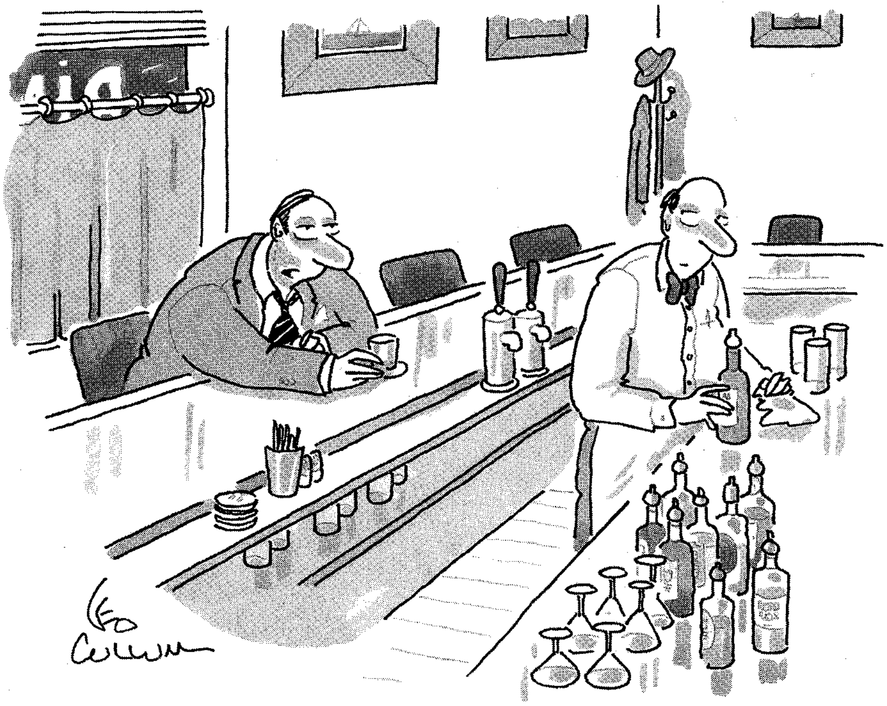
David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 86) is a film critic for the magazine. He has just published a memoir, "American Sucker."

Tom Cheney (The Back Page, p. 88) published his first cartoon in *The New Yorker* in 1978. ♦



"Another flu shot, Larry."

THE MAIL

A FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

Alex Ross argues that J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" owes more to Richard Wagner's "Ring" cycle than the author's admirers like to acknowledge. (A Critic at Large, December 22nd & 29th). But it's worth mentioning that the ring, as an archetypal symbol of status and power and commitment, has an even deeper and richer history in our culture, one that precedes both Wagner and Tolkien. Plato told the story of the ring of Gyges, which conferred invisibility on the shepherd who found it, as a way of discussing the temptations of power; the legend of Theseus contains an episode in which he must find a ring underwater, in order to confirm his divine parentage. But beyond that, as Ross mentions, Wagner and Tolkien had very different aims. Wagner was, after all, a nineteenth-century German revolutionary; Tolkien was a profoundly conservative (in the non-political sense of the word) twentieth-century Englishman. Tolkien owes a debt to the northern legends, but what he took from them he stripped completely of paganism—a critical modification. He also owes a debt to his experiences growing up in a part of England that closely resembles the Shire, as well as to his service in the trenches in the First World War and his confronting the bombing of England in the Second. Most of all, he owes a debt to his lifelong fascination with languages, which were his starting point in creating the world of "Lord of the Rings." Finally, to simply say that Tolkien's world is "self-abnegating, Anglican-modern" territory is to miss something else that is essential about him. He was Catholic, and his nostalgia for a lost England is a thing quite his own.

Robert Levine
Glendale, Wis.

THE DEATH OF DAVID KELLY

Readers of John Cassidy's generally excellent article on the suicide of David Kelly, the British weapons specialist who was exposed as the source of a BBC report, might have had the impression that I told Dr. Kelly that "the gloves are off" with regard to the press's treatment of him ("The David Kelly Affair," December 8th). I did not, nor did Janice Kelly say I did. Instead, she said that those words were Dr. Kelly's, which he used to describe his feelings after our conversation. When I spoke to Dr. Kelly in the driveway of his home, I treated him courteously. He had just learned that the Ministry of Defence had released his name to journalists, and he asked me what the reaction would be; I told him that there would likely be great interest. He was a long-standing contact and a friend. The offer of hotel accommodation was made by me to Dr. Kelly because he was clearly bewildered and because he risked being besieged by photographers and camera crews if he were to stay at his home. The *Sunday Times* was the only newspaper concerned enough to report, before Dr. Kelly's death, presciently and tragically, that he looked pale and tired and that the prospect of being exposed as the "BBC mole" had played heavily on his mind.

Nicholas Rufford
Assistant Editor, The Sunday Times
London, England

Cassidy, in relating that Kelly adopted the Baha'i faith, describes it as "an offshoot of Islam." Although Bahaism was started in Iran and within the context of Islamic society, it is an independent religion; it is not, and never was, affiliated with Islam. In fact, one of its founders was exiled from nineteenth-century Iran for his beliefs, and Baha'is have long been persecuted in that country.

Mary Coleman Forrester
Windsor, Conn.

•

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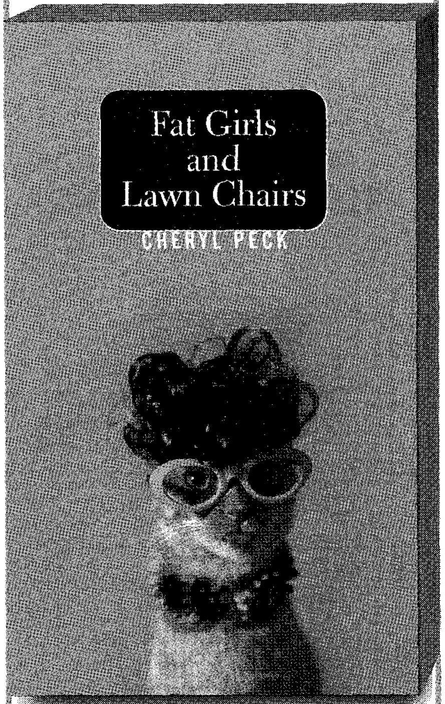

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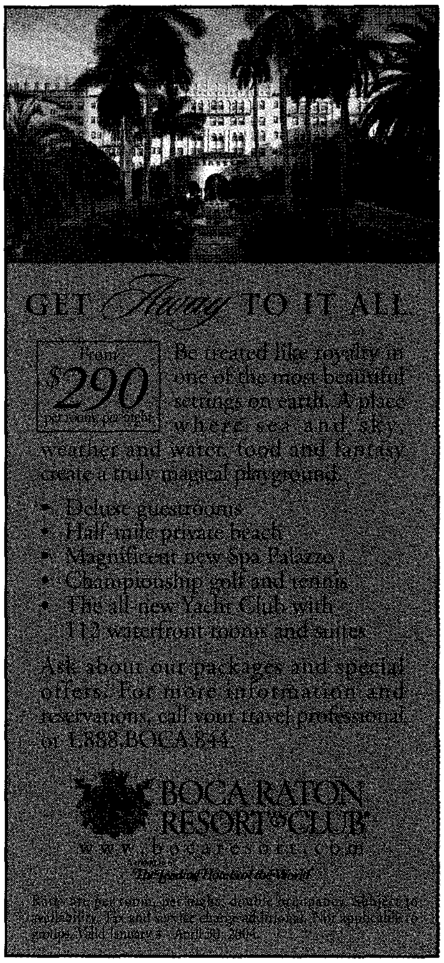

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

LIFE DURING WARTIME

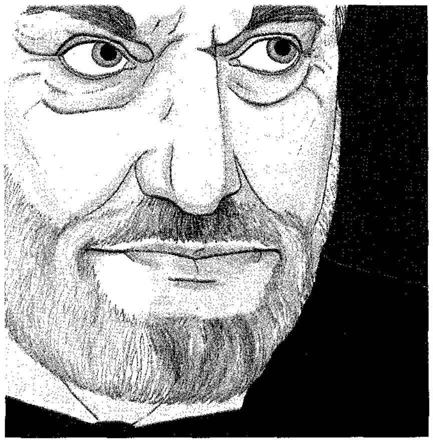
Banned in France in 1965 and screened at the Pentagon in 2003, Gillo Pontecorvo's film "The Battle of Algiers" is technically fiction, but its exploration of the Algerian uprising against French rule in the late nineteen-fifties is as sound as any documentary. The movie's clinical depiction of the command-and-control structure of revolutionary cells was later studied by real-life insurgents like the I.R.A. and the Tamil Tigers. Through the figure of a French colonel (Jean Martin) who arrives with a team of armed paratroopers, Pontecorvo presents the point of view of a policing army. "To know them means we can eliminate them," the colonel says of the stubborn rebels. "For this we need information. The method: interrogation." (Film Forum, starts Jan. 9; see Movies.)

PASSING BACK THE BATON

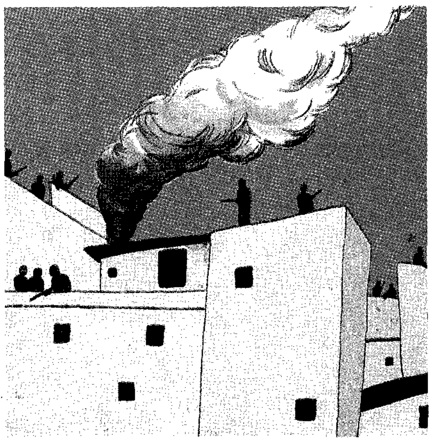
Kurt Masur, with his blunt brand of musical politics, may have worn out his welcome after more than a decade as the music director of the New York Philharmonic. Still, his gritty and inward style was a large part of what made the Philharmonic great again; it stands in contrast to the style of his able but flashier successor, Lorin Maazel. This month, Masur returns for three weeks of concerts, including concertos by Beethoven, Shostakovich, and Szymanowski. (Avery Fisher Hall, Jan. 8-10 and Jan. 13; see Classical Music.)

JAZZ, WITH A TWIST

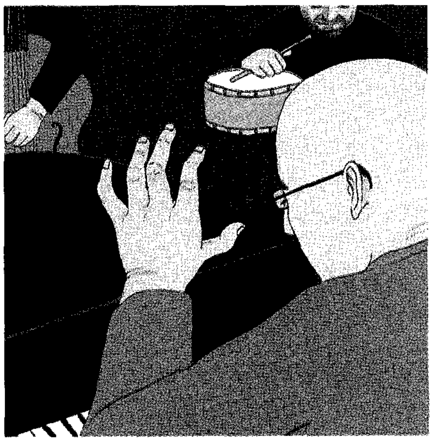
In 2003, the Bad Plus released "These Are the Vistas," a CD that remade the jazz piano trio for the rock era, both because of the material (a cover of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," for example) and the intensity of the performance. The pianist Ethan Iverson anchors the trio, which also includes the bassist Reid Anderson and the drummer David King. "These Are the Vistas" topped several year's-best lists, and this week the group débuts music from its forthcoming album, "Give." (Joe's Pub, Jan. 9; see Night Life.)



Kurt Masur returns to conduct the New York Philharmonic.



Gillo Pontecorvo's "The Battle of Algiers," at Film Forum.



LARA TOMLIN

The jazz piano trio the Bad Plus plays at Joe's Pub.

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS
New York Theatre Workshop presents a new play by Julia Cho, about an errant father and a missing son. Directed by Chay Yew. In previews. Opens Jan. 11 at 1:30. (83 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

DEMON BABY
The Clubbed Thumb theatre company presents a new play by Erin Courtney about a homesick American wife in London who acquires a diabolical imaginary friend while her husband is at work. Opens Jan. 9 at 8. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

HIGH HEELS AND RED NOSES
The neo-vaudevillian Bindlestiff Family Cirkus presents a new show in which the action begins after a clown named Kinko discovers a high-heeled shoe in the trash. In previews. Opens Jan. 12 at 8. (Palace of Variety, 125 W. 42nd St. 877-246-3537.)

KING COWBOY RUFUS RULES THE UNIVERSE
Richard Foreman's Ontological Theatre presents a new production in which an ersatz President Bush is attacked by bears, babies, and statues of the dead. With Juliana Francis, Jay Smith, and T. Ryder Smith. Previews begin Jan. 8. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-533-4650.)

NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS
The group celebrates its thirtieth season with three productions: "Iolanthe," "H.M.S. Pinafore," and "The Mikado." All performances are directed and conducted by Albert Bergeret, who leads a twenty-five-piece orchestra. "Iolanthe" plays Jan. 9-11. The season runs through Jan. 25. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

PERSIANS
Aeschylus's drama about the Persian Wars receives a new production at the Pearl, starring Joanne Camp, Robert Hock, Sean McNall, and Scott Whitehurst. Directed by Shepard Sobel. In previews. Opens Jan. 11 at 7. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

THESE VERY SERIOUS JOKES
David Greenspan leads the cast in Target Margin's newest production, an adaptation of Part I of Goethe's "Faust," which takes its title from Goethe's own description of his obsession with the tale. Directed by David Herskovits. Opens Jan. 8 at 7. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AUNT DAN AND LEMON
Wallace Shawn is a philosopher in the Socratic mode: he puts ideas on the stage. In the New Group's revival of his haunting and transcendent 1985 play, Lili Taylor plays Leonora, or Lemon, a woman with an undisclosed illness who cultivates the garden of her memory in flashbacks dominated by a loquacious family friend she calls Aunt Dan (Kristen Johnston). Aunt Dan argues for the human face of fascism and reveals her desire for Henry Kissinger—whom she regards as one of the most eligible bachelors in the world (the political context is the nineteen-seventies). Just as Aunt Dan yearns to be overwhelmed by force—a male force—Lemon secretly desires to be overwhelmed by Aunt Dan. Taylor uses her voice like a metronome, a steel rod that clicks lightly away, while her mind plays con brio. She has done the best work of her career in recent years, contributing something valuable to contemporary American acting: unsympathetic characters whose humanity cannot be denied. Directed by Scott Elliott. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/5/04.) (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

Black Dice stir up a ruckus at the Hammerstein Ballroom (see Night Life).

JOHN RITTER

BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, PART II
Alexander Harrington presents the second part of his daring theatrical interpretation of Dostoyevsky's masterpiece. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Closes Jan. 18.)

THE COOK
The gusto of Eduardo Machado's first-rate play is matched by the direction of Michael John Garcés, who begins the evening with a party in the lobby that segues into the first act, set amid the hubbub of a kitchen in a Havana mansion in 1958. It is the last pre-Castro moment, and Machado uses the kitchen as a metaphor to examine the oppression and betrayals of both exile and revolution over a span of forty years. Zabryna Guevara gives a luminous performance as the adroit, loyal cook, who keeps faith with her reactionary mistress only to learn in her old age that she herself has not been kept in mind. (Intar 53, at 508 W. 53rd St. 212-279-4200. Closes Jan. 18.)

DINNER WITH DEMONS
Jonathan Reynolds, the *Times* food columnist, is something of an ideal man—he cooks, he feels, he amuses—and in this lovely one-man show he tells us stories about his past as he prepares a feast, in real time. His first cousin was the late movie star Lee Remick, his mother was a kind of New England Blanche DuBois, and his father, a self-made businessman in the Big Daddy mode, couldn't resist flirting with his son's girlfriend when the burgeoning gourmand was a young student. But Reynolds never lost his optimism, which he exhibits while deep-frying a turkey, making a soufflé, and flipping an apple galette. Sadly, the audience can't taste his handiwork: the city health code forbids it. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. Closes Jan. 18.)

FRAME 312
In Keith Reddin's play, set in the nineties, Lynette (Mary Beth Peil), a woman who possesses the original Zapruder film, is at a breaking point after keeping the footage secret for years. Flashbacks to the sixties illuminate her dilemma, showing how the young Lynette (Mandy Siegfried), as an eager-beaver assistant at Time-Life, was entrusted with the reel by her dying boss (the terrific Larry Bryggman). Karen Kohlhaas directs. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200. Closes Jan. 11.)

GOLF: THE MUSICAL
Among the eighteen songs in this amiable, madcap revue are a rock-gospel tribute to Tiger Woods and a new scheme for progressive American interventionism called "Let's Bring Golf to the Gulf." Apart from delivering their better-than-par melodies, the players also impersonate the devoted golfers Bob Hope and Bing Crosby and invite members of the audience onstage to join them in a putting contest. Directed by Christopher Scott. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St., 212-239-6200.)

THE LAST LETTER
In a spare and affecting production by Theatre for a New Audience, directed by the documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman, Kathleen Chalfant plays a Russian Jew in Ukraine during the Second World War who unsentimentally recounts her final days in a letter to her son. Douglas Stein's black, angular set and Donald Holder's lighting collude eerily, sometimes throwing multiple shadows off Chalfant that make her appear to be one amid a gray, shaded crowd, at other times casting a single, larger shadow that looms over her, seeming either to guard or to oppress. Adapted by Wiseman from a chapter of Vasily Grossman's novel "Life and Fate." (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-239-6200. Closes Jan. 11.)

NEVER GONNA DANCE
Based on the classic 1936 movie "Swing Time," starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, this effervescent new musical is a scrapbook of Depression-era reality made Art Deco shiny. While trying to make good in Gotham, Lucky Garnett (Noah Racey) meets Penny (Nancy Lemenager), an innocent dance instructor with strawberry-blond sausage curls, and they join a dance competition. Racey is a strong dancer with a clean line, but he doesn't try to imitate Astaire or hide how hard this ambitious show is to perform. The feline and ferocious Deidre Goodwin is thrilling as Velma, one of their competitors. With songs by P. G. Wodehouse, Ira Gershwin, Johnny Mercer, and others. Directed by Michael Greif and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. (12/15/03) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE REGARD EVENING
Bill Irwin's postmodern love song to vaudeville uses hat tricks, ventriloquism, trapdoors, and two trampolines. The production, the second in the Signature Theatre Company's Irwin season, combines "The Regard of Flight," from 1983, with its sequel, "In the Same Regard" (2003), which gives the Internet a well-deserved comeuppance. The rubber-faced Irwin, in stripy pajamas and nightcap and various other costumes, struggles in vain to please two masters: Doug Skinner, the straight man, who moderates and plays the piano and ukulele, and Michael O'Connor, as a pesky drama critic and bossy director. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

WONDERFUL TOWN
The musical from 1953, about two spirited Ohio sisters' adventures in Greenwich Village, is a buoyant, beautifully staged revival that gives us back a thrilling glimpse of the gaiety, wit, confidence, and craft of the American musical in its populist heyday. The show boasts a well-played, fizzy Leonard Bernstein score and a terrific set of Comden and Green lyrics that stop the show several times, with a special huzzah for "One Hundred Easy Ways (to Lose a Man)." The excellent cast is superbly directed and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall. As Eileen, Jennifer Westfeldt swings, but Donna Murphy, as her sardonic, droll sister Ruth, owns the stage. This is one of those musicals that made the myth of Manhattan as an isle of joy. And after the sublimely silly seven-minute "Conga!" you almost believe it. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.
ANNA IN THE TROPICS
Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.
BECKETT/ALBEE
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.
BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.
THE BOY FROM OZ
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE
SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.
CAROLINE, OR CHANGE
Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.
CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.
CIRCUS OZ
New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 11.)
DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.
FAME ON 42ND STREET
Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
GOLDA'S BALCONY
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.
HENRY IV
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 18.)
I AM MY OWN WIFE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.
JOSH KORNBLUTH'S LOVE AND TAXES
Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-868-4444. (Closes Jan. 11.)
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.
LYSISTRATA
Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-677-0060.
MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

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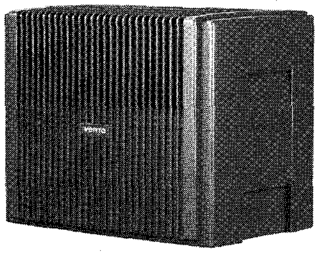

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Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

NOBODY DON'T LIKE YOGI
Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH
Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 18.)

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES
Theatre at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Pl. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW
Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

THE RIVALS
Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.

ROSE'S DILEMMA
City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

TALES FROM THE MANHATTAN WOODS
Wings Theatre, 154 Christopher St. 212-627-2961. (Closes Jan. 17.)

THE THING ABOUT MEN
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

TRUMBO
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 18.)

URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 18.)

WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
City Ballet's yearlong celebration of George Balanchine's centennial begins in earnest with a selection of dances demonstrating the breadth of his repertory. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" has fairies and butterflies, "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" has gangsters in fedoras, and, later this month, the imperial "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2" is presented alongside the dark, wrenching "Prodigal Son." On show this week are Balanchine's purest statements of modernist classicism, "Apollo" and "Concerto Barocco." Sprinkled among the works are ballets by choreographers that Balanchine admired; this week features August Bournonville's delicate, precise "Flower Festival in Genzano." ♦ Jan. 6 at 7:30 and Jan. 10 at 2 and 8: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." ♦ Jan. 7 at 8: "Apollo," "Scotch Symphony," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ Jan. 8 at 8: "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2," "Concerto Barocco," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." ♦ Jan. 9 at 8: "Serenade," "Scotch Symphony," and "Prodigal Son." ♦ Jan. 11 at 3: "Concerto Barocco," "Flower Festival in Genzano," "Prodigal Son," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." ♦ Jan. 13 at 7:30: "Apollo," "Donizetti Variations," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." Through Feb. 29. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570.)

"ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT"
In the second week of the Joyce's festival of contrasting choreographers, Rebecca Stenn/Perks-Dance Music Theatre enters the lineup. In terse sketches that betray Stenn's training with Momix, the group's musicians—a violinist, a cellist, an electric bassist, and a drummer—share the stage with the dancer and sometimes use their instruments as quirky props. Aside from the première of "The Seventh Wave," a reverie on the cycle of life, the program concentrates on stripped-down interpretations of such classic scores as "La Mer," "The Rite of Spring," and "Carmen," in which moments of whimsy and tenderness enliven an overall blandness. Stenn shares the week with John Kelly, who offers his autobiographical medley, "The Skin I'm In," in which five ballet dancers, who do more miming than dancing, join Kelly as he relives moments of his past performances—as Orpheus, Egon Schiele, and other characters. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Stenn: Jan. 7 and Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 2. Kelly: Jan. 8 at 8, Jan. 10 at 2, and Jan. 11 at 7:30. The festival continues through Jan. 18.)

JODY OBERFELDER DANCE PROJECTS
In "Landmarks of Dreams," Oberfelder and her company evoke the weightless fantasia of Marc Chagall's paintings in a suite of works ranging in mood from ecstatic to sombre to abstract. In the carnivalesque opening section, men and women spin, turn somersaults, and take turns swinging one another around by the ankles. Later, during a reflective solo by Oberfelder, luminous projected images of the dancers underwater form a surrealist backdrop, bright colors in slow motion matching her movement. With music by Frank London of the Klezmatics, Edward Ratliff, and Rob Schwimmer. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. Jan. 8-11 at 8.)

"DANCING HENRY FIVE"
This dance interpretation of Shakespeare's "Henry V," choreographed by David Gordon, is set to music derived from William Walton's score for Laurence Olivier's famous 1944 film of the play. The recorded voices of Olivier and Christopher Plummer blend with a new narration by Valda Setterfield. With lighting by Jennifer Tipton. (Danspace at St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Jan. 8-11 at 8:30. Through Jan. 18.)

BAX/BROOKLYN ARTS EXCHANGE
The Park Slope-based group begins this season's "First Weekends," a series of performances followed by discussions, with "Loveless Duets," by De Facto Dance, and two works by Rubí Theatre Company: "Love (in Times of War)," choreographed by Alicia Díaz and David Matiano, which is set to Schumann's "Dichterliebe" and performed live by the tenor José Joaquín García and the pianist Djuna Babiera, and "Doo-Wop Moderno," a "Nuevo Latino" blend of acoustic bass, beatboxers, rappers, singers, and hip-hop artists. (421 Fifth Ave., at 8th St., Brooklyn. 718-832-0018. Jan. 9-10 at 8.)

FUGATE/BAHIRI BALLET NY
The chamber-ballet group formerly known as DanceGalaxy has a short season at Symphony Space, featuring performances of Antony Tudor's "Continuo," set to the Pachelbel Canon; Balanchine's "Valse Fantaisie," set to Glinka; Peter Martins's "Reflections"; and a new ballet by Thaddeus Davis, "Vivaldian Chat," set to Bobby McFerrin's recordings of Vivaldi and Bach. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 8-10 at 7:30.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

YEAH YEAH YEAHS
This raucous trio follows a year of international touring with a home-town show; the extravagant front woman Karen O, who has been known to turn cartwheels and pour beer on herself onstage, will

Globalfest brings musicians from around the world to the Public Theatre.

LAURENT CILLUFFO

TABLES FOR TWO

MATSURI
369 W. 16th St. (212-243-6400)—Matsuri, a vast green tiled vault of a dining room underneath the Maritime Hotel, is designed for gawking. Great sight lines under artfully smashed paper lanterns let you follow the goings on in the ridiculously animated room. The staff trolls through, and the high-living crowd, who go outside to smoke whether or not their entrées have just arrived, constantly exchange hello-again air kisses. The soundtrack booms over it all, an esoteric iPod party mix of sixties soul, Ethiopian funk-jazz, and . . . the English Beat?

The food, by Tadashi Ono, a veteran of La Caravelle, probably wasn't supposed to be an afterthought, but here the scene and the noise relegate his dishes almost to the level of decoration. The lotus roots in soy sauce, sake, and red pepper are so compulsively munchable that they make you want to watch television. A bowl of hot peppers under a cloud of bonito flakes is exciting, and the slivers of fluke in ponzu strike a nice balance between the refreshing and the harrowingly spicy. The sushi menu is extensive, but the entrée side of the menu is forgettable—lobster miso soup will leave you feeling foolish (really, you should have known), and the sake black cod tastes like fish candy. An entrée just seems like too much commitment in this context.

A long sake list is seen to by a lanky sake sommelier, Saori Iino, who is able to distill any diner's limited sake knowledge into a satisfying choice. And her whispered explanations are mesmerizing: "Very aromatic, with an aftertaste like water, I hope you will like this sake very much please." Her recommendation of Komekomeshu, from Hiroshima, for after dinner was wonderful, and it rightly overwhelmed the hilarious emperor-has-no-clothes dessert: chilled tofu in strawberry water. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $7-$28.)

—*Owen Phillips*

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have plenty of room to channel the badass heart of rock and roll. With **Black Dice.** The Brooklyn noise-rockers may have turned ethereal on their album "Beaches and Canyons" (some of the ambient, bass-heavy compositions top fifteen minutes), but their live shows remain excellent opportunities to lose your hearing. Also opening are the **Liars** and **Devendra Banhart.** (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. Jan. 9 at 7:30.)

GLOBALFEST
The world-music aisle of your local record store comes to life as sixteen artists converge on three stages at the Public Theatre. The range of styles and performers is extremely wide (everything from the hip-hop stylings of the Cuban singer Raul Paz to the classical strains of the Persian spike-fiddle player Kayhan Kalhor), and the sets are short (only forty minutes), so it will be possible to span the globe in one evening. Highlights include an acoustic set by Angélique Kidjo, the cathartic wailings of the fado singer Mariza, and the sensuous voice of Susheela Raman. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. Jan. 10, starting at 8.)

VIDA BLUE
A side project of the Phish keyboardist Page McConnell, Vida Blue includes the bassist Oteil Burbridge (of the Allman Brothers Band and Aquarium Rescue Unit) and the drummer Russell Batiste (of the Meters). For the group's latest album, "The Illustrated Band," McConnell turned to a genre-defying Miami outfit called the Spam Allstars, and Vida Blue's extended jams now incorporate the horns and rhythms of Little Havana. With the **Jazz Mandolin Project.** (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. Jan. 10 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The Egyptian oud master Hamza El Din, who is known as the father of contemporary Nubian music, shares the stage with the former Kronos Quartet cellist Joan Jeanrenaud. (Skirball Center, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Pl., at Washington Sq. S. For more information, call 212-545-7536. Jan. 11 at 7.)

NATALIE MAC MASTER
This Cape Breton native has fiddling in her blood—her uncle is Buddy MacMaster, the dean of the windswept island's fiddle culture. But Natalie is not at all provincial. Her new album, "Blueprint," has its share of jigs and reels, but there are also contributions from top bluegrass players, including the vocalist and mandolin player Sam Bush and the banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 12 at 8.)

BEAUSOLEIL
The Cajun fiddler Michael Doucet and his band swing by for a night of warm Louisiana grooves. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. Jan. 12 at 8 and 10.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 9: **Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.** The nineties big-band swing revival is now a zoot-suited memory, but this Los Angeles ensemble, notable for its inclusion in the 1996 film "Swingers," is still around. The group has grown, and it included New Orleans jazz and Latin touches on its latest album, "Save My Soul," its first in four years. Jan. 12: The **Del McCoury Band.** McCoury is a former lead singer in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys and the current chair of one of the country's most electrifying bluegrass bands. His sons Ronnie and Robbie are featured on mandolin and banjo. Jan. 13: Bedford-Stuyvesant's homegrown a-cappella group the **Persuasions.**

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (212-228-6300)—Jan. 7: The legendary songwriter **Chip Taylor** (his credits include "Wild Thing" and "Angel of the Morning") and the talented young fiddler and singer **Carrie Rodriguez** stop by with songs from their latest collection, "The Trouble with Humans." Jan. 9: The Woodstock veteran **Richie Havens.** With **Janis Ian.** Jan. 10: "Ribbon of Highway—Endless Skyway" is a tribute to Woody Guthrie, featuring such folks as **Slaid Cleaves, Eliza Gilkyson, Sarah Lee Guthrie,** and **Johnny Irion.** Note: At press time the club was facing eviction by its landlord, New York University.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 9: The **Ropeadope New Music Seminar** is a night of non-stop jams. The lineup includes **John Medeski** and **Jason Moran** playing acoustic-piano duos; the sacred-steel legends the **Campbell Brothers,** backed by a full gospel choir; and a performance by **DJ Logic,** the drummer **Bobby Previte,** the guitarist **Charlie Hunter,** and the horn player **Skerik.** Jan. 10: The **Scissor Sisters,** a flamboyant local outfit who fuse vintage glam rock with synth-fuelled Euro-disco (and top the whole production with glitter), are making a name for themselves with theatrical shows and an unorthodox rendering of Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb." Jan. 13: The **Thrills,** an upcoming Irish group with a shameless penchant for American pop—especially the music of California—from the sixties and seventies. Their début album, "So Much for the City," is full of sunny, harmony-laden music.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—Jan. 10: The New York sextet **Melomane** crafts intricate pop songs with chamber-music flourishes. Fronted by the Parisian-born Pierre de Gaillande, the band has a potent rhythm section that is fleshed out with cello, trumpet, keyboards, and the vocals of Daria Klotz. With the **Silent League.** The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Jan. 11: **Stew,** a raconteur and singer from Los Angeles (his other

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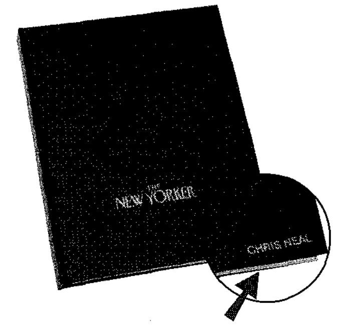

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band is a power-pop outfit called the Negro Problem), writes sophisticated songs that are not likely to be heard on the radio. Echoes of Cole Porter, Burt Bacharach, and Randy Newman can be heard in his work. Jan. 12: **They Might Be Giants** rework their old songs. Jan. 13: **Vusi Mahlasela** is a South African singer whose avian vocals and dramatic range earned him the name "the Voice" at home.

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Jan. 9: **Huun-Huur-Tu,** a group of musicians from Tuva, a small republic in the southern-Siberian fold above Mongolia, who practice the art of *khoomei*, or throat singing. Jan. 10-11: **Perla Batalla** grew up in her parents' record shop in Venice, California, and went on to sing backing vocals for Leonard Cohen and K. D. Lang. She returns to her roots with her latest release, "Discoteca Batalla," which is named after her father's store. It includes material by José Alfredo Jiménez, Tomás Méndez, and other Mexican musicians.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Jan. 6-8: The deft young vocalist **Lizz Wright** spins an eclectic web of jazz, folk, and R. & B., along with her own songs. She has a voice big enough to share a bill with the mighty **Aaron Neville,** which she'll be doing on Jan. 9-12. Neville, for his part, took his sweet time releasing a jazz album. But last year's "Nature Boy" was worth the wait. Neville, to no one's surprise, swings.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, starting Jan. 9, the sexy singer **Ute Lemper,** in her Café Carlyle début. Lemper has extraordinary vocal strength and interpretive imagination, and she's so in control of an audience that resistance to her icy charms is next to impossible.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Jan. 11: The **Masters of Groove** have the credentials to back up the bravado of their name: Reuben Wilson is an old-school practitioner of the Hammond organ, Bernard (Pretty) Purdie may have more hit records to his credit than any other session drummer, and the guitarist Grant Green, Jr., has the groove in his genes thanks to his fretman father, Grant Green. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Jan. 6-8: The piano-playing jazz singer **Dena DeRose** should be better known. She's an incisive self-accompanist, and her shrewd keyboard skills match her delightful vocal interpretations. Jan. 9-10: Palmetto is among the most deserving of those little jazz labels that could. Three of the company's finest share a bill here: the singer **Kate McGarry,** the saxophonist **Ted Nash,** who fronts his Still Evolved ensemble, and the lyrical piano giant **Fred Hersch.** Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Jan. 9: The **Bad Plus** (see This Week).

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Jan. 11: The **Wessell Anderson** sextet. The earthy alto saxophonist Anderson has worked for the trumpeter **Wynton Marsalis** since the late eighties. This week it's the other way around, as his boss joins him here. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

Publicity stills of Anita Ekberg by Phil Stern, at Staley-Wise.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—A combination axe and pistol, made in 1580 from German steel gilded with gold, looks both too beautiful and too arcane to use. The same might be said for an embossed-steel horse's "head-defense" from thirteenth-century Tibet, or an Edo-period torso protector consisting of bear fur, iron, and lacquered leather. But all three trophies, like most of the pieces in **"Arms and Armor: Notable Acquisitions, 1991-2002,"** have seen battle. The Met's beloved Arms and Armor galleries were renovated in 1991, and subsequent acquisitions are highlighted in this little show, which emphasizes the expanded Asian holdings. Through Jan. 18. ♦ What does a widower do when his daughters elope with the family's chauffeur and electrician? Grenville L. Winthrop turned to collecting, amassing more than four thousand objects that he later donated to his alma mater. But, despite the fact that the collection was assembled practically across the street from the Met, this is its first New York viewing. Winthrop was partial to classic French painting, and **"A Private Passion: Nineteenth-Century Paintings and Drawings from the Grenville L. Winthrop Collection, Harvard University"** includes a stunning David portrait of Emperor Napoleon I, a virtually photographic Prud'hon, "Study of a Seated Man," and the rich-hued "Odalisque and Slave," by Ingres. Most enchanting, though, are the "reductions" from Rodin's "Burghers of Calais," which look modern in context. Through Jan. 25. ♦ A retrospective of the works of El Greco. Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Bravehearts: Men in Skirts"** can't help but be a history of failures—Dubya will never visit the troops in Gaultier's military jacket and cargo skirt nor will David Beckham play for Real Madrid with Galliano's upside-down soccer jersey around his hips. But Beckham has donned a sarong for vacation wear, and similar informal wraps, paired with sweaters and button-down shirts, look credibly macho. A kilt (in mink) and *shalwar kameez* (in cotton) appear manly enough as well, if only on the museum's straight-backed, straight-faced mannequins. Celebrity relics include Neo's robe from "The Matrix" and Mel Gibson's tartan from the film of the show's title. Through Feb. 8. ♦ **"Treasures of a Lost Art: Italian Manuscript Painting of the Middle Ages and Renaissance."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Dreams of Yellow Mountain: Landscapes of Survival in Seventeenth-Century China."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Prints, Books & Things"** shows off the compendium of Kiki Smith's favored images: eyes, breasts, birds, babies, cats, Little Red Riding Hood, and the starry sky. Although she's primarily a sculptor, this retrospective of works on paper and fabric makes it clear that her three-dimensional thinking is deeply influenced by the etchings, artist's books, and even Xeroxes collected here. The range of works is impressive, from Smith's first experiments with silk screen in the eighties to the beautiful "Blue Feet," a series of drypoints and etchings made last year, and they reveal a side of her that's quick, funny, luscious, and fragile. Through March 8. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

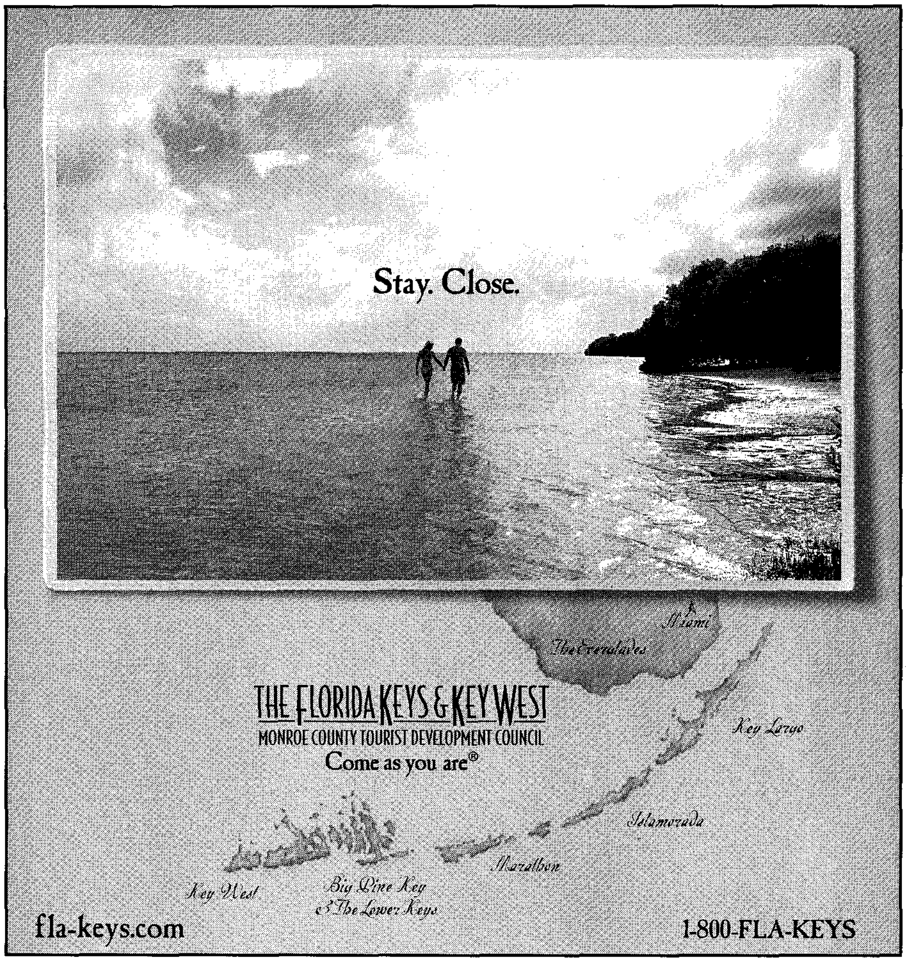
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"James Rosenquist"** is a pinball machine of a retro-

spective, gracing the museum's ramp with two-dimensional equivalents of rackety lights and bumpers. The early Pop work, which uses billboard-painting techniques to create surrealistic montages of slightly outdated magazine imagery, feels immortal. It nails a recurrent concern of modernity: the rolling blind spot of the recent past. Bigger, slicker later paintings succumb to mere razzmatazz. But Rosenquist earns blanket forgiveness on the strength of his classic "F-111" (1964-65), a multi-panelled wraparound work, eighty-six feet long, that distills the madnesses of the nineteen-sixties with supple, violent majesty. Through Jan. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—It was easy to predict that **"Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective of Drawings"** would be a ravishing show, but it was harder to foresee how powerfully it would argue for Gorky as the most gifted of all American artists. Right from the start, in the early nineteen-twenties, until the exceedingly bitter end, in the year of his suicide, 1948, Gorky was a draftsman of unequalled, at times almost unbearable sensitivity. Whether he's working in pencil, ink, charcoal, pastel, or crayon, form melts and jells in shallow, tactile depth at his sensuous touch. Lines are like exposed nerves, colors like inflammations. Nearly every picture burns with intelligent, vulnerable life. Through Feb. 15. ♦ The sparkling mid-career painting retrospective **"John Currin"** will be this season's major conversation piece. Topic: how have super-old-fashioned, alternately academic- and schlocky-looking figure paintings become the bee's knees in contemporary art? Currin's mostly imagined winsome nudes, pathetic males, society dames, gay couples, and, oh yes, women with breasts as big as the Ritz make everybody nervous in one way or another. They also display phenomenal degrees of skill and subtleties of expression. Once you start looking at Currin's stuff, it's all you can do to stop. Through Feb. 22. ♦ **"Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

DAHESH MUSEUM
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—Charles Bargue and Jean-Léon Gérôme assembled the hundred and ninety-seven drawings that made up Bargue's "Cours de Dessin" in the late eighteen-sixties and early seventies, and Goupil printed them for years after, in a loose portfolio of lithographs. Bargue's pages of ears, eyes, mouths, and hands and drawings from classical sculpture and European painting were traced and copied by generations of students. Startlingly obedient sketches by Picasso and van Gogh (shown in reproduction) reveal Picasso to be a confident prodigy at twelve, van Gogh a struggling autodidact at twenty-eight. In **"Charles Bargue: The Art of Drawing,"** these sketches and the selections from the *cours* appear near Bargue's own painfully academic late paintings, which suggests that he may have been his own most dutiful pupil. Through Feb. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART ANNEX SPACE
391 Broadway (212-219-1222)—**"Killer Instinct,"** which pays homage to the growing genre of video-game art, has a natural emphasis on violence. Tom Betts's "Quake"-like gaming engine creates a painterly and abstract moving projection with a violent soundtrack. Eddo Stern, a former Israeli soldier, has made a castle-shaped sculpture that runs the U.S. Army's recruiting video game, "America's Army." Some works, though, are more restive, like Cory Arcangel's "Naptime," a hacked eight-bit "Super Mario Brothers 2" cartridge with a hypnotic, tinkling soundtrack. In Brody Condon and Shih Chieh Huang's interactive sculpture, viewers squeeze turkey basters filled with highlighter fluid over copper wires to activate a soothing electronic song. Through Feb. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 6, and Thursdays, noon to 8.)



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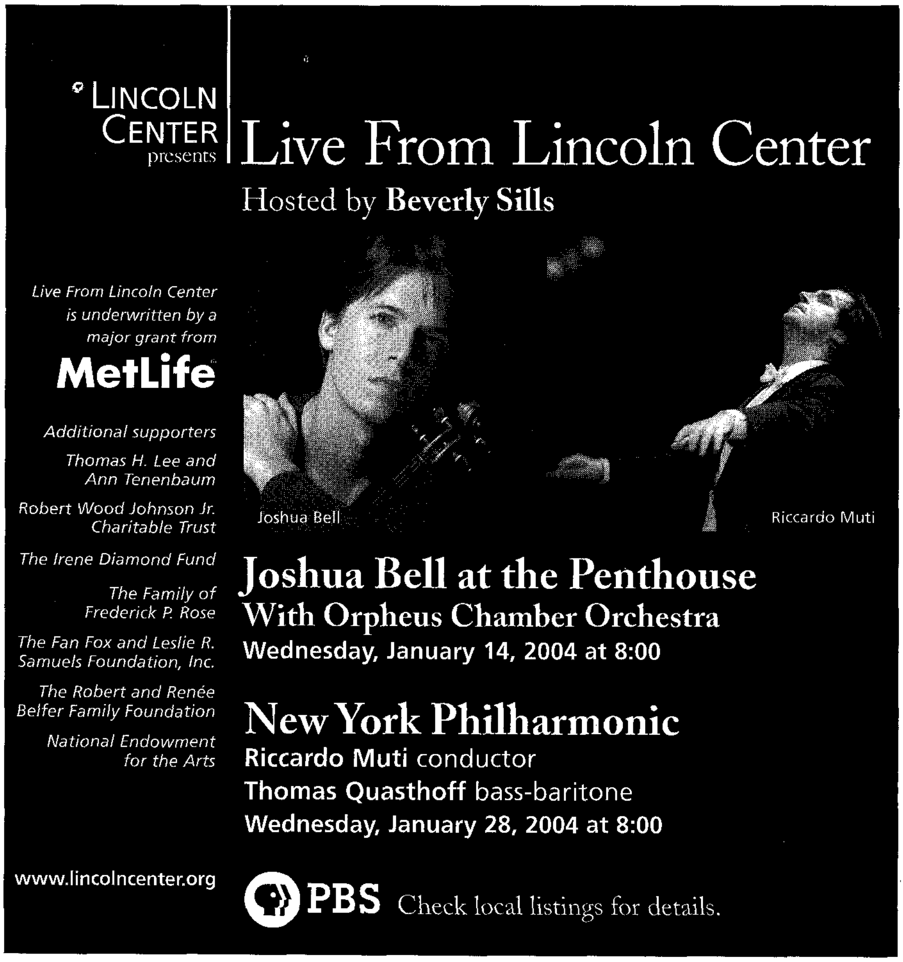
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Thomas Quasthoff bass-baritone
Wednesday, January 28, 2004 at 8:00
PBS Check local listings for details.

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MATTEO PERICOLI
Pericoli's "Manhattan Unfurled" documented the island's perimeter in a single, continuous line drawing. This sequel, "Manhattan Within," follows the more luxurious interior coast, the skyline as seen from Central Park. Like its predecessor, it's drawn on a single scroll; all thirty-two feet of the original oil pastel are rolled out here, along with source material, a chaotic photocollage. The scroll is a snapshot itself; transients caught in its view include cranes hovering over 1 Columbus Circle. Through Jan. 24. (Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Ave., at 50th St. 212-935-3960.)

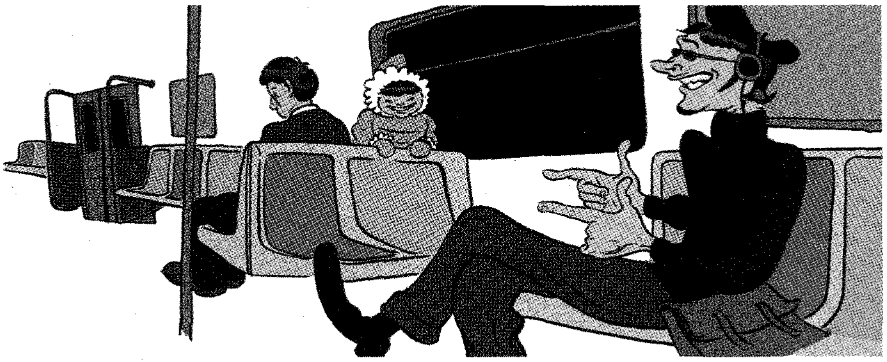
Short List

GEORG BASELITZ
Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Feb. 7.

TONY CRAGG
Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Jan. 17.

JAZZ NOTES

Ten favorite CDs from 2003, listed alphabetically.



ZOHAR LAZAR

The Bad Plus, "These Are the Vistas" (Columbia)—Not every jazz piano trio plays songs by bands associated with grunge (Nirvana), New Wave (Blondie), and electronica (Aphex Twin). Few are guided by a rock producer (Tchad Blake). And hardly any have a drummer (the thunderously inventive David King) who seems to be channelling the late Keith Moon. Genre-bending aside, the Bad Plus succeeds because of its musicianship; on the band's resourceful originals, the pianist Ethan Iverson, the bassist Reid Anderson, and King maneuver through compositions that may one day be standards themselves.

Ron Carter, "The Golden Striker" (Blue Note)—What makes Carter a truly great bassist is his ability to find his place within a piece of music; he's not one to simply show off his technical gifts. This lovely chamber-jazz recording, featuring the guitarist Russell Malone and the pianist Mulgrew Miller, is as effortlessly musical as any album of the prolific bassman's long career.

Harry Connick, Jr., "Other Hours" (Rounder)—With a whip-smart quartet that features the tenor saxophonist Charles (Ned) Goold, Connick sharpens tunes he wrote for the short-lived Broadway musical "Thou Shalt Not." No matter what the songs sounded like onstage, on the recording they are strikingly melodic, and they elicit an improvisatory spirit. That the leader sticks to Monk-influenced piano and never opens his mouth to sing is only a plus.

Roy Haynes, "Love Letters" (Columbia)—Haynes, only a few years short of his eightieth birthday, proves that age is just a state of mind. Surrounding himself with younger improvisers, some decades his junior (including the bassist Christian McBride and the saxophonist Joshua Redman), he shows the same suppleness and force that he exhibited earlier in his career, as a sideman for Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Gary Burton, and others.

Shirley Horn, "May the Music Never End" (Verve)—Horn, a matriarch among jazz divas, was recovering from major health problems when she recorded this triumphant collection of ballads and light swing tunes. Although unable to play piano—keyboard assistance is furnished by George Mesterhazy and Ahmad Jamal—the sexagenarian Horn displays full control of her vocal powers and brings new life to tried-and-true standards like "Watch What Happens" and "This Is All I Ask."

Jason Moran, "The Bandwagon" (Blue Note)—A distinguished alumnus of Greg Osby's jazz finishing school, the pianist Moran cut this record with his telepathically connected bandmates, the bassist Tarus Mateen and the drummer Nasheet Waits, at the Village Vanguard. Like the Bad Plus, Moran's band has a penchant for nontraditional ideas: listen to the answering-machine messages integrated into "Ringing My Phone (Straight Outta Istanbul)" and the kaleidoscopic take on the hip-hop favorite "Planet Rock."

Ted Nash, "Still Evolved" (Palmetto)—The saxophonist Ted Nash, one of the most adaptable and responsive sidemen around—he's a linchpin of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra—steps out on his own. Even though Nash opts for the conventional here—with a two-horn-and-rhythm-section setup—his writing is intriguing, and he also gets juicy playing out of his boss, the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

Greg Osby, "St. Louis Shoes" (Blue Note)—This saxophonist may be one of our leading vanguard jazzmen, but he knows where his roots lie. Looking back to durable tunes that influenced him during his Midwestern youth, Osby reimagines such classics as Ellington's "East Saint Louis Toodle-Oo" and Dizzy Gillespie's bebop anthem "Shaw Nuff" with support from the trumpeter Nicholas Payton, another smart young player willing to learn from the past.

Wayne Shorter, "Alegría" (Verve)—Shorter, a magisterial tenor and soprano saxophonist, hasn't made an all-acoustic studio album for more than thirty years, but it was worth the wait. Remolding older tunes and slipping in unexpected choices (the Celtic favorite "She Moves Through the Fair," Villa-Lobos's "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5"), he confirms that he's a master of mood setting and a soloist who remains sui generis.

Cassandra Wilson, "Glamoured" (Blue Note)—The material on this lush new album includes Sting's "Fragile," Bob Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay," and the seventies soul classic "If Loving You Is Wrong," as well as infectious originals, but Wilson never forgoes the improvisatory spirit and rhythmic lustre of her jazz roots. Whatever direction she turns, she remains the most sensuous vocalist of our time.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

MARCEL DZAMA
This curiously hip Canadian (Viggo Mortenson and Sarah Vowell wrote the text for his recent box of prints, published by McSweeney's) executes charmingly delirious paintings in ink, watercolor, and root beer on manila paper. Dozens of small, cheerful images of violence and upheaval cover the walls: Dargeresque little girls armed with knives and guns smile and threaten hybrid tree people, masked women engage creatures of uncertain species in erotic situations. Dzama knows what he's up to, as do his subjects, and the peril is more amusing than disturbing. Through Jan. 24. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

JOHN KLIMA
Klima once invited viewers to play a video game about a goldfish: the fate of a live fish in an adjacent tank was at stake. The close correspondence between the virtual and the real is also the subject of this new work, a model railway with phone control and Game Boy surveillance. Those who call 212-229-2829 can start and stop the train, choose which characters will be picked up on the journey ("Lana is a high-class prostitute involved in a clever scam. Press star for Lana. Press pound to continue your voyage"), and listen to their conversations, spliced together from dialogue from eight movies. It's perfect for the viewer who has always wanted to direct—but only until six, when the line goes back into use as the gallery's fax. Through Jan. 17. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

JAMES TURRELL
Two new, oh-wow environments by the light artist: a darkened room with a framed glow (gradually alternating red and blue) and a raised stage that viewers enter four at a time, wearing booties, to confront and—for bootied folks waiting their turn—to be silhouetted against a vast lavender effulgence. As usual with Turrell, the colors appear to belong to solid walls, or at least to scrims, but don't; they fill imperceptible white recesses. Some people deem the restful, amniotic effect mystical. Madame Blavatsky might agree. Through Jan. 10. (PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

Short List

RITA ACKERMANN
Andrea Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Jan. 17.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

TOM JOHNSON / CARRIE MOYER
Two contemporary renditions of social realism are on view here. Tom Johnson calls his style "better social realism"; the show includes sculptures made with slabs of white ceramic shaped vaguely into body parts and studded with pencil drawings of fashionable women, reminiscent of Robert Longo's "Men in the Cities." But the better social realism is in Carrie Moyer's paintings, which transform logos and images from twentieth-century resistance movements into quasi-abstract paintings. Moyer downloads her images from the Internet, then prints them on transparent plastic and projects them on canvas, creating compositions like "Chromafesto (Emma Goldman 1.2)," which combines the peace and female symbols with an abstract, logo-like portrait of the radical anarchist and feminist. Through Jan. 18. (Canada, 55 Chrystie St. 212-925-4631.)

AMY O'NEILL
O'Neill revisits mid-twentieth-century America with an industrial bunker built inside the gallery and a series of black-and-white drawings based on fountain designs for the 1964-65 New York World's Fair. Dusty family-size cans of sliced peaches and pineapples lurk inside the bunker, and the "special protective glasses" provided for viewers (actually 3-D movie glasses) make the Day-Glo spiral motifs on the walls look like radioactive mold. The fountain drawings were originally de-

signed with "Peace Through Understanding" in mind. They include one image of the winner, the "Unisphere," which still stands outside the Queens Museum of Art. Through Jan. 24. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

KENRO IZU
Ghosts—of long-gone artisans and priests, as well as of the millions murdered by the Khmer Rouge—haunt Izu's hushed, elegant photographs of Angkor Wat. The most memorable pictures here focus on details: a bas-relief of an inscrutable, smiling face, its nose crumbled away; a carved doorway smothered by a heap of pleated roots. Many images are offhandedly splendid—in one wide shot, a whole temple is echoed in a lake that also reflects clouds, and the entire structure appears to be part of a dream. Through Jan. 17. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 212-645-9444.)

ROBERT MC CANN
There's something refreshingly anachronistic about McCann's photos of leaves, grass, and twigs. The still-lifes were arranged atop an old X-ray viewer, then shot with an eight-by-ten-inch camera; some of the results recall Irving Penn. Others evoke loose-limbed Japanese calligraphy or Abstract Expressionist paintings. Through Jan. 17. (Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

ROCKY SCHENK
In Schenk's dreamy black-and-white images, signs float above heads, and stairways twirl down from nowhere toward empty plazas. The photographs don't seem to be related to one another. A laughing woman holds a drink in what could be a stage set from a snappy thirties drawing-room comedy; a group of people stare at the sun's reflection over the sea. But shapes recur: winding forest paths, the arc of a waterfall's lip, a sidewalk that curves around a curved building. Through Jan. 17. (Bateman, 560 Broadway. 212-925-7951.)

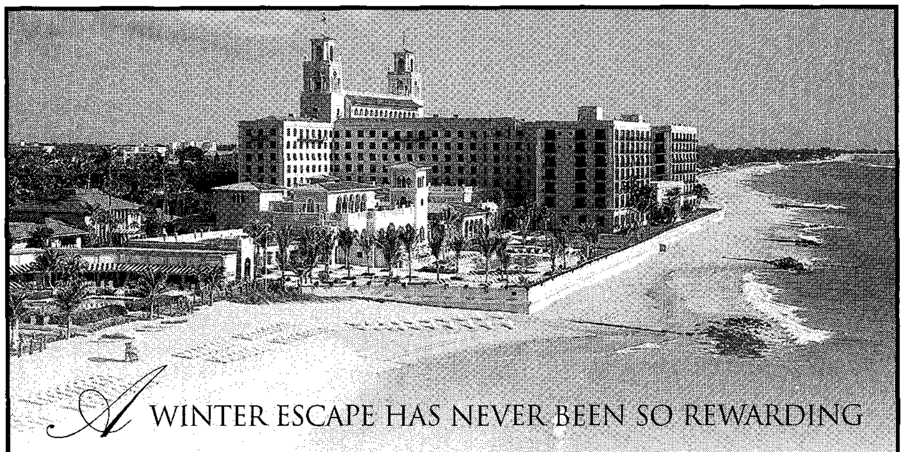
"ONLY SKIN DEEP"
This rambunctiously curated cross-section of nineteenth-century tintypes, vintage stereograms, recent videos, and works by important young artists tries to make sense of the messy intersection of race and photography. "Ethnographic studies" of American Indians are shown near photographs by Max Becher and Andrea Robbins of German families wearing war paint and Sioux headdresses; a panoramic photo of an "Americanization Pageant," taken in Milwaukee in 1919, is near a group of early Cindy Sherman images that show the photographer in blackface; the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz's large-scale picture of his ink drawing of Frederick Douglass hangs near "Ebony and Ivory," a beautiful, early nude study by F. Holland Day of a black man holding a small classical sculpture of a man with a spear. Through Feb. 29. (International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 212-857-0000. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 8, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List

PHIL STERN
Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 212-966-6223. Opens Jan. 9.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Susan Graham's mezzo-soprano is as lovely as ever, but her wholesome mien will never quite fit the title role of Lehár's **"The Merry Widow,"** a kind of musical Schnitzler play in which aristocratic fin-de-siècle females have to tart themselves up to insure their husbands' affections. The straight-tone singing of the Danish baritone Bo Skovhus may have all the subtlety of wind shear, but he certainly makes a dashing Count Danilo. Tim Albery's glamorously self-conscious production pokes fun at the piece while respecting its se-



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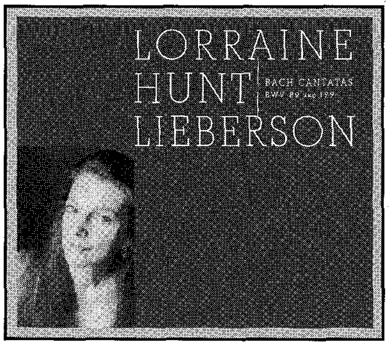

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– *The Los Angeles Times*

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ductive style; Kirill Petrenko conducts a simple but rousing account of the score. (Jan. 7 and Jan. 10 at 8.) ♦ The final performance of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** with Theodora Hanslowe, Juan Diego Flórez, Dwayne Croft, and Paata Burchuladze leading the cast; Bruno Campanella conducts. (Jan. 8 at 8.) ♦ **"Rigoletto,"** with Andrea Rost, Frank Lopardo, and Juan Pons; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 9 at 8.) ♦ With Olga Makarina, Raúl Hernández, and Frederick Burchinal replacing Rost, Lopardo, and Pons. (Jan. 13 at 8.) ♦ None of Massenet's deftly fashioned melodramas can match his adaptation of Goethe's **"Werther"** for melodic richness or expressive power. In the company's performances this season, Roberto Alagna (as Werther), Vesselina Kasarova, Lyubov Petrova, and the redoubtable Paul Plishka all appear in their roles for the first time at the house; Jacques Lacombe. (Jan. 10 at 1:30.) ♦ Plácido Domingo takes to the pit to conduct the first performance this season of **"Madama Butterfly,"** featuring Veronica Villarroel in the title role and Marco Berti, in his Met début, as Pinkerton. (Jan. 12 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA: "DIE FLEDERMAUS"
Anthony Amato directs and conducts a holiday run of Johann Strauss II's bubbly operetta, staged in the company's famously compact theatre on the Lower East Side. (319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Jan. 10 at 7:30 and Jan. 11 at 2:30. These are the final performances.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Glenn Dicterow, the orchestra's concertmaster) is the centerpiece of the first of Kurt Masur's three programs with the ensemble, sandwiched between works from two ends of the German symphonic tradition, Haydn's Symphony No. 88 in G Major and Reger's Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Mozart. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 8 and Jan. 13 at 7:30, Jan. 9 at 11 A.M., and Jan. 10 at 8. See This Week.)

"CANTATAS IN CONTEXT"
Mary Greer concludes her three-concert series at St. Bartholomew's Church, leading the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the New York Baroque Soloists in the Cantatas IV-VI from Bach's "Christmas Oratorio." The singers include the soprano Ilana Davidson, the mezzo-soprano Mary Westbrook-Geha, and the tenors Benjamin Sosland and Michael Slattery. (Park Ave. at 51st St. 212-378-0248. Jan. 11 at 3.)

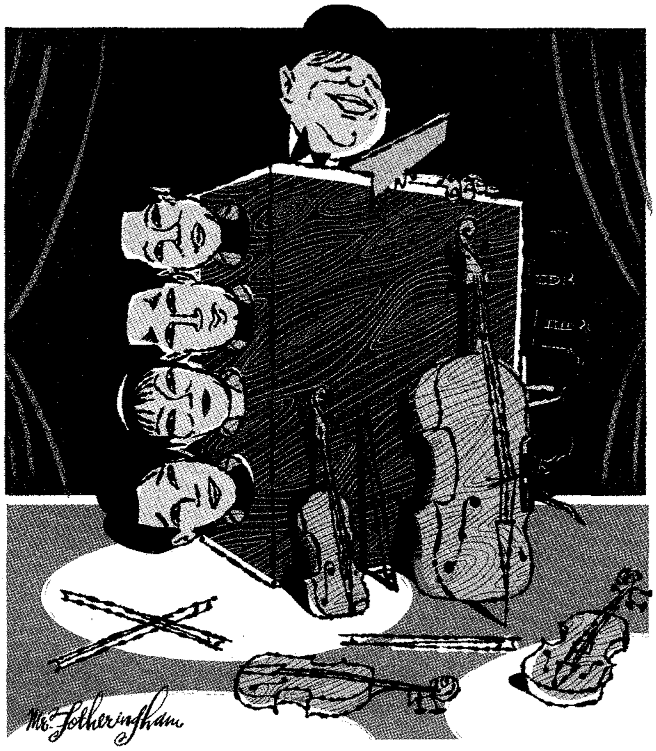
PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Wolfgang Sawallisch, the Philadelphia Orchestra's conductor laureate, has never been a conductor to whom one looks for innovation and excitement but rather for those gifts of proportion and experience that suit the works of the German masters he favors—such as Bruckner's Fifth Symphony, which he leads in the group's latest concert at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. Jan. 13 at 8.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Pacifica String Quartet performs works by Mozart and Brahms (the Piano Quintet in F Minor, with the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott) in an intimate concert at the Rose Studio. (Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5788. Jan. 8 at 6:45.)

BARGEMUSIC
Mark Peskanov—the floating chamber-music series's artistic director and favorite violinist—joins with three colleagues for two programs traversing Beethoven's Op. 18 string quartets. Jan. 8-9 at 7:30: Quartets Nos. 1-3. ♦ Jan. 10 at 7:30 and Jan. 11 at 4: Quartets Nos. 4-6. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

FRED HO'S "VOICE OF THE DRAGON 2: SHAOLIN SECRET STORIES"
The World Music Institute takes its "Interpretations" concert series uptown to present the world première of the avant-jazz saxophonist and composer's latest epic, inspired by the portentous myths and explosive action sequences of Hong Kong cinema. Ho's renowned Afro Asian Music Ensemble will share the stage with a dozen martial-arts masters choreographed by Jose Figueroa. (Apollo Theatre Soundstage, 253 W. 125th St. 212-545-7536. Jan. 8 at 8.)



The Ying Quartet collaborates with the magician Torkova at Symphony Space on January 9.

ENSEMBLE SOSPESO
Sospeso, one of the city's more staunchly modernist new-music ensembles, loosens its collar a bit for a happy-New Year program marking the fiftieth birthday of John Zorn (with "Roadrunner," for accordion) and honoring the life of George Plimpton ("Boomer Waltz"—who knew he composed?). The soprano Lucy Shelton, the cellist Wendy Sutter, and the accordionist William Schimmel are among the performers, who will also offer music by Ligeti, Brahms, and Björk (an arrangement of "Army of Me"). (Angel Orensanz Center, 172 Norfolk St. Jan. 9 at 8. No tickets required.)

YING QUARTET: "NO BOUNDARIES"
Torkova, magician to Hollywood stars and a noted scholar of his craft, will provide some prestidigitational accompaniment to the latest installment of the young American group's "No Boundaries" series at the Thalia Theatre. The Yings, who once shared the stage with a Chinese noodle-maker, should remain unfazed as they perform music by Debussy (the Quartet in G Minor) and the première of Bernard Rands's String Quartet No. 3, "Commentaire." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 9 at 8.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Jan. 9 at 8: In the second of three Brahms evenings featuring some of the museum's favorite artists, the clarinettist Richard Stoltzman joins the pianist David Deveau and the American String Quartet to play the Clarinet Quintet and other works. ♦ Jan. 10 at 8: The Guarneri String Quartet offers another installment of this season's Beethoven cycle, including the second of the "Razumovsky" Quartets and the Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 74 (the "Harp"). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
Khachaturian's centennial gets its due in the Philharmonic's latest chamber concert, in which his music shares the program with works by Jongen, Mendelssohn (the impassioned Piano Quartet in F Minor, Op. 2), and by Jon Deak, the orchestra's associate principal bassist and one of the concert's featured performers. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 11 at 3.)

MUSIC BEFORE 1800 SERIES: MARION VERBRUGGEN
How many recorder players could meet the challenge of a solo recital? This Dutch virtuoso is one, and her program at Corpus Christi Church will feature not only an abundance of Renaissance dances and ricercars but her own renowned transcriptions of suites and fantasies by Telemann and Bach. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Jan. 11 at 4.)

BELLA DAVIDOVICH AND ALEXANDER SITKOVETSKY
The eminent Russian pianist shares a concert of Mozart, Prokofiev, and Franck with her grandnephew, a twenty-year-old violinist of considerable promise (in his New York début). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 212-288-0700. Jan. 11 at 5.)

"CELEBRATING CHARLES WUORINEN"
Wuorinen, born some sixty-five years ago on the Upper West Side, writes an uncompromisingly cerebral type of music that is a mirror to the rough vigor and resilient spirit of his home town. Its qualities have long attracted some of the world's leading musicians—including the pianist Ursula Oppens, the cellist Fred Sherry, the Cygnus Ensemble, and others, who offer a concert of works old and new. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 11 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"DOG TAGS YAPPING"
In 1943, at the age of eighteen, M. D. Elevitch headed to France as an infantryman in the U.S. Army. Between fighting in the Battle of the Bulge and being critically wounded during a German mortar bombing, he wrote witty, and often troubling, letters to his family in Duluth, Minnesota. After languishing in basements for more than fifty years, his correspondence has been published along with his sketches and cartoons in a new book called "Dog Tags Yapping." On Jan. 13 at 8, Elevitch reads from the collection, in which he describes everything from carrying antitank land mines across the front lines to a hundred uses for an Army helmet. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.)

READINGS
Jan. 12 at 7:30: Jesse McKinley, a cultural reporter for the *Times*, and Seth Herzog, a writer and actor, present a night of comic fiction and nonfiction. (Junno's, 64 Downing St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Jan. 12 at 8:15: The poets Alfred Corn and Mary Jo Salter offer a selection of their verses. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

TALKS
Jan. 7 at 8: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the chairman of Harvard's African-American Studies department, reflects on civil rights, the literary canon, and changes in the American cultural landscape. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.) ♦ Jan. 8 at 6: The playwright Tony Kushner discusses his work. (Coliseum Books, 11 W. 42nd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Jan. 8 at 7: Paul Muldoon, winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for poetry, offers a close reading of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva's "Poem of the End." (Poets House, 72 Spring St. 212-431-7920.)

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

MOVIES OPENING

AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER
Nick Broomfield ("Biggie and Tupac") directed this documentary about Aileen Wuornos, the Florida woman who was put to death in 2002 for killing seven men. Opening Jan. 9. (Sunshine Cinema.)

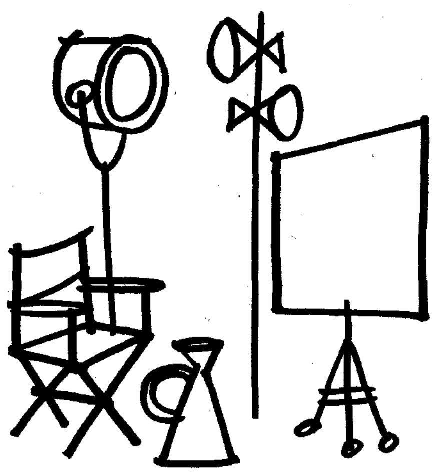
CHASING LIBERTY
The rebellious daughter of the President of the United States (Mandy Moore) ditches her Secret Service agents and travels through Europe with a charming Brit (Matthew Goode), in a comedy directed by Andy Cadiff. Opening Jan. 9.

FILM NOTES

L'ATALANTE
To miss out on this movie should be a civil offense punishable by law. It has often been acclaimed as the masterwork of the French director Jean Vigo, although his admirers would politely point out that masterworks were all he was capable of making. The story tells of a pair of newlyweds who spend their honeymoon travelling down the Seine toward Paris and the sea. In some inexplicable way, it feels like the complete portrait of a marriage. We get sulks, stabs of jealousy, complicit smiles in the morning, and moments of desire which startle even now; how they must have looked in 1934, goodness only knows. If the couple's senses are lit by love, Vigo's are on fire, and the film remains an astonishing exploration of texture, from its famous shots of the bride, in the brilliant white of her wedding dress, stepping along the fog-slicked darkness of the boat, to the husband's wild searchings for her beneath the Seine. With a rude and rasping Michel Simon as the ship's mate—an animal answer to the lyrical longings elsewhere. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 10.)

AVALON
Anime meets anomie in this futuristic live-action adventure filmed in Poland by the Japanese cartoon legend Mamoru Oshii. He conjures a weather-beaten ambience from Warsaw's shingled roofs and cobbled streets and then intensifies the depressing mood by digitizing most of the color into sepia, gray, and white. In the midst of all this reverse cheerfulness he places an addictive virtual-reality war game called Avalon, and follows a well-toned woman named Ash as she risks her life to reach the highest level of play. Why wouldn't she, when everything outside the game is so dull? Numbingly if purposely devoid of emotions, yet visually fascinating, this 2001 movie plays off "The Matrix" just as that movie played off Oshii's "The Ghost in the Shell"—at one point Ash's basset hound becomes the White Rabbit. Luckily, Oshii corrals discussion of hope versus fatalism to one speech, and leaves open the question of whether a computer-manufactured environment might be an acceptable wonderland. In Polish.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 8.)

BAD SANTA
There's something appealing about a dyspeptic comedy with an alcoholic Santa Claus (Billy Bob Thornton), a foulmouthed elf (Tony Cox), and a script that sends up the faux togetherness of the holidays, but this movie is more scatological than subversive. Terry Zwigoff, who directed "Crumb" and "Ghost World," has a knack for finding the grotesque in modern America, and he has a terrific child actor in Brett Kelly, a butterball whose unbreakable belief in the spirit of Christmas carries the film. Yet, once the rude shock of a profane Claus wears off, there's not really much to do except await the next outrageous remark.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Sutton 1 and 2, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)



THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS
Rémy (Rémy Girard), the plumply boisterous philanderer of Denys Arcand's 1986 film, "The Decline of the American Empire," is now in his early fifties and dying of cancer in a Quebec hospital. His investment-banker son, Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau)—a svelte, devastatingly efficient young man who disapproves of his reprobate father—shows up from London, arranges for Rémy's comfort as best he can, and reassembles the gang of gabby intellectuals who were Rémy's friends and colleagues in the earlier movie. The hospital room becomes the site of an ongoing party: sexual memories, bawdy jokes, political tirades, and regrets bang off the walls at all hours. Eventually, the entire group relocates to a house on the same lake that was the setting for "Decline"; as Rémy grapples with his failures and satisfactions, the movie shuts up and calms down. Arcand's film might be called an idyll of death, and the concluding scenes, in which Rémy tries to pass something on to the next generation, are intensely moving. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/24/03.) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS
Like "Potemkin," this film, originally released in 1965, is an epic in the form of a "created documentary"; it's a reconstruction of the events of 1954 to 1957 in the guerrilla war waged by the National Liberation Front against the French authorities, with the oppressed, angry masses as the hero. The enemy of the Algerian N.L.F.—the hyper-intelligent French colonel played by Jean Martin—isn't really a character; he represents the cool, inhuman manipulative power of imperialism versus the animal heat of the multitudes rushing toward us as they rise against their oppressors. The director, Gillo Pontecorvo, and his co-writer, Franco Solinas, are almost too clever in their use of this device of the colonel—yet it works, and brilliantly. The revolutionaries forming their pyramid of cells don't need to express revolutionary consciousness, because the French colonel is given such a full counter-revolutionary consciousness that he says it all for them. He even expresses the knowledge that history is on the side of the oppressed colonial peoples, who will win; he himself is merely part of a holding action, preserving imperialism a little longer but bound to fail. The movie has a firebrand's fervor; it carries you with it, and doesn't give you time to think. In French and Arabic.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; starting Jan. 9.)

BIG FISH
The title is apt enough; this movie is long, wet, and wriggling, and, after a while, you may want to hold your nose. It tells the story of Edward Bloom, played in his youth by Ewan McGregor and in the final act of his life by Albert Finney. That life is a picaresque, crammed with exaggeration and casual magic—a witch with a glass eye that shows forthcoming deaths, say, or a pair of spangled night-club singers who are also Siamese twins. This is easy stuff for somebody of the director Tim Burton's gifts, and you seldom feel that the new picture tests him or turns him on in the way that "Beetlejuice" or "Edward Scissorhands" did. The result is his most emotionally reactionary work to date. With Billy Crudup as Bloom's poor stooge of a son, Danny DeVito as a circus ringmaster, Matthew McGrory as a moping giant, and Jessica Lange and Alison Lohman, both badly underused, as the older and younger versions of the hero's only love.—*A.L.* (12/15/03) (Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

COLD MOUNTAIN
A heroic attempt to capture, in all its tangled bitterness, the backwash of war—the lawless, scrappy life that takes shape behind the lines in an atmosphere of uneasy freedom. Inman (Jude Law), a young Confederate soldier, badly wounded and spiritually depleted, deserts his company and tries to make his way back to his home town in North Carolina and to a young woman, Ada (Nicole Kidman), he knew briefly and fell in love with. Along the way, he has a series of grotesque, terrifying adventures. Ada, meanwhile, aided by an arrogant interloper (Renée Zellweger) with a strong back, learns to run the farm that her late father left to her. The coming together of the two lovers has a satisfying kind of inevitability, like the halves of a drawbridge falling into place. Anthony Minghella adapted Charles Frazier's acclaimed 1997 novel, and directed in a style both high flown (the lovers' letters soar over the tormented landscapes like a blessing) and filthy with the mire and blood of war. The extraordinary cast includes Donald Sutherland, Eileen Atkins, Brendan Gleeson, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Giovanni Ribisi.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

THE COOLER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Sutton 1 and 2.)

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING
A slow, attentive movie about a painter and his model demands the kind of patience that moviegoers, especially in this hectic season, may feel reluctant to supply. But Peter Webber's reworking of Tracy Chevalier's novel is worth staying with: it casts a heavy spell as it unfolds the tale of Griet (Scarlett Johansson), a maid newly arrived in the house of Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). The year is 1665, and the period reconstruction, for those who are aroused by such things, is—apart from a few modern lines of dialogue—formidably detailed. The danger with such beautifying efforts is that cinema will turn into a branch of taxidermy, and what keeps Webber's movie alive is the tenseness of the setup (will this girl stay in the artist's household, and, if so, will she become his lover or his muse?), and, above all, the presence of Johansson. She is often wordless and close to plain onscreen, but wait for the ardor with which she can summon a closeup and bloom under its gaze; this is her film, not Vermeer's, all the way.—*A.L.* (12/15/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

IN AMERICA
The tale of an Irish family that travels to New York in search of a better life, or, at any rate, a life. Johnny (Paddy Considine), his wife, Sarah (Samantha Morton), and their daughters, Christy (Sarah Bolger) and Ariel (Emma Bolger), settle near Hell's Kitchen and wrestle, as you would expect, with outlandish local customs such as air-conditioners and Halloween. Despite the title, the director, Jim Sheridan, is gripped less by the country in which his characters find themselves than by their own hope and anguish: there was a third child, a boy, who died before they came to

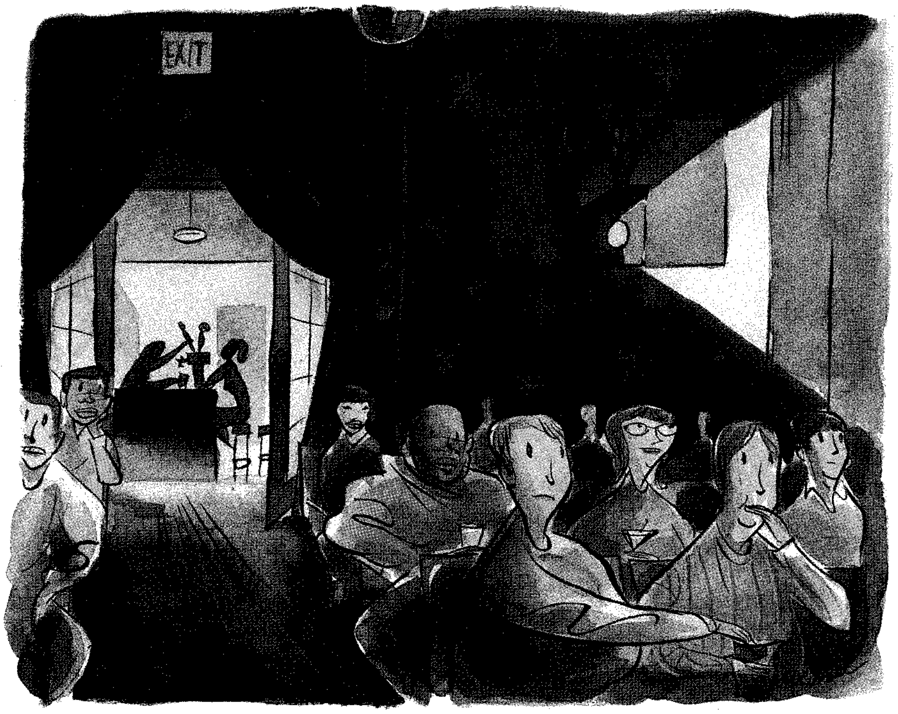
the States. The movie has a busy intensity but lacks the rooted confidence of Sheridan's Irish work, as seen in "My Left Foot" and "In the Name of the Father." What ties it down, if anything, is the performance of Sarah Bolger—ten years old when the picture was made, but the sanest and saddest person on the block.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS
This tart black comedy on the craving for social position and the art of murder has a brittle wit that came as a bit of a shock: such amoral lines were not generally spoken in forties movies. The film is heartless, and that is the secret of its elegance. Ninth in line to inherit a dukedom, the insouciant young hero (Dennis Price) systematically eliminates the intervening eight: a snob, a general, a photographer, an admiral, a suffragette, a clergyman, a banker, and the duke—all, by a casting stroke of genius, played by Alec Guinness. Secure in the knowledge that Guinness will return in another form, the audience suffers no regret as each abominable D'Ascoyne is coolly dispatched. And as the murderer takes us further into his confidence with each foul deed, we positively look forward to his next success. Originally released in 1949.—*P.K.* (Moving Image; Jan. 11.)

THE LAST SAMURAI
Tom Cruise is Nathan Algren, a disillusioned Civil War hero, who goes to Japan in 1876 and trains the Emperor's army in modern warfare. In their first encounter with the great samurai Lord Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe), the gun-toting soldiers are overwhelmed and Algren is carted off to Katsumoto's mountain retreat, where the two warriors have dignified conversations about loyalty and cherry blossoms and other profound Japanese things. Redeemed by discipline and honor, Algren trains as a samurai and, in the end, fights alongside the great man. The director, Edward Zwick, attempting to revive the stately manner of sixties epics, has made a very earnest piece of work—handsome, methodical, pious, and rather doggedly literal. The training sequences are fun (Cruise gets knocked on his ass again and again), and the big battles are thrilling. Yet the naïve association of virtue with feudalism and the scene of Algren kneeling before the Emperor induce a certain amount of queasiness. With the beautiful ex-model Koyuki as Taka, the widow who takes care of Algren.—*D.D.* (12/8/03) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING
The final act of Tolkien's saga. Many hours after Gandalf (Ian McKellen) showed up in the Shire and arranged for the transportation of a significant piece of personal jewelry, Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) staggers to the brink of Mount Doom and prepares, if he can muster the will, to cast the One Ring into the flames. By any standard, it has been an exhaustively splendid trip, crammed at once with private anxiety and lofty overviews of public strife. In this last installment, we are privileged witnesses not just to the Ringbearer's quest but also to a furious pitching of battles, as an ocean of orcs beats against the shining walls of Minas Tirith. The old gang—Legolas (Orlando Bloom), Gimli (John Rhys-Davies), and Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen)—is on hand to save the day and, by implication, the future of a civilization. The director, Peter Jackson, loyal as ever to the original book, has inherited a serious case of anticlimax; he is no more capable than Tolkien of finding a pastoral peace, at the close, that can match the energy of his war. Nevertheless, there should be enough here to dazzle the doubters; will Jackson have the nerve to remix his work, in all its majesty, and release a ten-hour marathon next year?—*A.L.* (1/5/04) (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 34th Street, and Union Square.)

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
Dziga Vertov celebrates the dynamic variety of quotidian urban life in his silent 1929 masterpiece, the apex of the symphony-of-the-street movie. Setting a prototype cameraman loose to chronicle an unnamed Soviet metropolis from dawn to dusk, he records the commotion on the boulevard and in the trolley yard, the kinetics of newfangled exercise machines that would fit right into today's infomercials, the goofiness and the chagrin at a bureau that handles both divorce and marriage. A protean stylist, Vertov deploys every device from split and superimposed images to pixellation and freeze-frames; his film has wit as well as gusto, a clearheaded lyricism, and a robust, sometimes vaudevillian humor. (Was he the first to cut from a supine woman to a hurtling train?)—*M.S.* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 11.)



A SCREEN AND A DREAM *A few small, nontraditional movie venues provide a welcome departure from the multiplex, including Cinema Classics, in the East Village. Typically, the programming is a mix of classics and experimental films, and sometimes an experiment with a classic—most famously, using Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon" as an alternate, and oddly appropriate, soundtrack for "The Wizard of Oz."*

MARCELLUS HALL

MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD
After a long wait, the work of Patrick O'Brian arrives onscreen. Two of his twenty Jack Aubrey novels have been requisitioned for this new Peter Weir film; instead of receiving a gentle introduction, we are launched straight into a fogbound firefight, and from there into a race around Cape Horn. The casting of Russell Crowe as Aubrey will divide the fans; he can handle the sway of action with aplomb, but O'Brian readers may flinch at his sullen air and pine for the bluffness of the original. Paul Bettany does a delicate job with the role of Stephen Maturin, Jack's best and cleverest friend; we sense his quiet eagerness—common to the work of Weir and O'Brian—to press on toward the darker reaches of the world and discover more. For all the foul weather, and despite the charming amputation scene, we feel ourselves to be in good company with these men, and strangely jealous of their packed and salted lives.—*A.L.* (11/17/03) (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

MONA LISA SMILE
Intelligent, responsible, superfluous. Miss Katherine Watson (Julia Roberts), a bohemian, feminist art historian from California, shows up as an instructor at Wellesley in 1953, when the college is still an upper-class breeding ground for dutiful young wives. Stirring the place up, Katherine involves herself in the lives of her students—a bitch (Kirsten Dunst), a floozy (Maggie Gyllenhaal), and a superior brain determined to marry right away (Julia Stiles)—and has an affair with a sexy but untrustworthy Italian teacher (Dominic West). The fight against traditionalism has long been won, so the movie encourages the audience to congratulate itself on what it already believes. Yet Mike Newell's direction is solid, and the period décor and costumes are a solemn riot of chintz and pleated skirts.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER
Despite its peculiar overtones of humor, this is one of the most frightening movies ever made (and truly frightening movies become classics of a kind). Robert Mitchum is the murderous, sex-obsessed, hymn-singing soul-saver with hypnotic powers, and his terrified new wife (Shelley Winters), who has a boy and a little girl from an earlier marriage, becomes his fervent disciple. He is something of a Pied Piper in reverse: adults trust him, children try to escape. The two kids' flight from the madman is a mysterious, dreamlike episode—a deliberately "artistic" suspense fantasy, broken by the appearance of a Christian variety of fairy godmother (Lillian Gish). The adaptation of Davis Grubb's novel was James Agee's last film work, and this shadowy horror fable was the first and only movie directed by Charles Laughton; released in 1955, it was a total financial disaster, and he never got a chance to direct again.—*P.K.* (Gramercy Theatre; Jan. 11.)

THE OUTLAW AND HIS WIFE
Victor Sjöström showed his directorial gift for wringing poetic force from the elements of nature in this sex-and-action-packed melodrama, set in rural Iceland in the mid-eighteenth century. He also stars as a virtuous sheep thief (he robbed

to feed his family) who escapes from prison, strikes amorous sparks with a proper farm widow, and, when a jealous rival uncovers his identity, runs off with her into the highlands. Although this 1918 silent is hardly a deep or probing work, it is a majestic one: it's no small feat for Sjöström to sustain emotions that match his mountains, blizzards, and hot springs. Sjöström's real-life spouse, Edith Erastoff, plays the outlaw's common-law wife.—*M.S.* (Gramercy Theatre; Jan. 10.)

SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE

Erica (Diane Keaton), a successful New York playwright and a woman who has been around the block a few times, is walking naked to her bathroom when a ladies' man named Harry (Jack Nicholson), a guest in Erica's house, stumbles upon her. How do these two veterans react to this unfortunate moment? Erica whoops, shrieks, and tries desperately to cover herself, while Harry throws up his hands as if to avoid an anthrax attack. What is the point of this hysteria? The writer-director Nancy Meyers appears eager to propitiate what she takes to be the national habit of youth worship. Harry and Erica do eventually hook up, but, for about half the movie, Meyers's embarrassment over sex between two sixty-year-olds makes the affair horribly self-conscious and less romantic than lewd—an "American Pie" for grownups. The picture does settle down, but the damage is done. And, while the upscale consumerist atmosphere of the movie is very knowing, there's very little genuine wit.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE

A boy is given a bicycle. He grows up to compete, under the tutelage of his ferocious grandmother, in the Tour de France, only to be kidnapped and smuggled overseas. The old lady, with a panting hound in tow, tracks and retrieves the unfortunate cyclist, aided by three crones who feast on a casserole of murdered frogs. Such is the gritty, fantastic plot of Sylvain Chomet's animated film, which could only have emerged from a culture in which the worship of comic books approaches the status of an organized religion. Indeed, there is much to revere in Chomet's swollen caricatures and vertiginous angles, although agnostics may be tempted to point out that a little elastic surrealism goes a long way, and that to learn the exact details of somebody else's dreams—which is what this movie feels like—can be at once haunting and tiresome. In French, just about, though most of it is noise, and no subtitles are required.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

21 GRAMS

Impassioned and affecting as some of it is, this desperately sincere drama of life and death in Nowheresville, U.S.A., is also an arrogant failure. Benicio Del Toro, dolorously made up with clown circles under his eyes, plays the Jesus-freak ex-con who accidentally runs down a man and his two little girls. Sean Penn, some sort of math professor with a bad ticker, gets the heart of the dead man, at which point he begins to follow around the grieving widow (Naomi Watts). Written by Guillermo Arriaga and directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, the same team responsible for the powerful "Amores Perros," the picture moves every which way but straight ahead. The intent of the scrambled syntax, one imagines, is to show how three sensitive and damaged people might encroach upon one another's lives, even infiltrate one another's unconscious, a process that works independently of time. But we don't know where we are in the story or why a given action should matter. The jagged pieces of the mosaic keep dropping off the wall and falling to the floor with a clatter. Yet the three stars act the hell out of their tormented roles, and, at times, they are amazing to watch.—*D.D.* (11/24/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE WIND

In Victor Sjöström's silent 1928 masterpiece of psychological terror, a well-bred Virginia girl (Lillian Gish) goes to Texas to live with her cousin, only to be turned out by his jealous wife and hounded by the men and the wind that pound the countryside. From the opening sequence of a train slicing through the landscape to the climax of a corpse buried in the blowing sand, the film moves like greased lightning. It's a brilliant anti-Western: when the heroine picks up a gun, what happens is both shocking and inevitable. (M-G-M is to blame for the jarring happy ending.) Gish is superb, her emotions unravelling like a frayed hemline. This performance compelled Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, to rank Gish "in the small circle of the first tragediennes of the world."—*M.S.* (Gramercy Theatre; Jan. 9.)

ALSO PLAYING

CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN

Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 64th and 2nd, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.

THE COMPANY

Paris and Union Square.

THE FOG OF WAR

Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

MILLENNIUM MAMBO

Cinema Village.

MONSTER

Lincoln Square and 19th Street East 6.

PETER PAN

Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

TO BE AND TO HAVE (9/29/03)

Cinema Village.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema Classics, 332 E. 11th St. (212-677-6309).
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Cinema Tropical." Jan. 9 at 7:30: "A Wall of Silence" (1993, Lita Stantic; in Spanish). ♦ Through Feb. 8: "Great Performances," introduced by New York film critics. Jan. 10 at 2: "The Last Command" (1928, Josef von Sternberg). ♦ Jan. 10 at 4: "Frankenstein" (1931, James Whale). ♦ Jan. 11 at 1:30: "Kind Hearts and Coronets" (†). ♦ Jan. 11 at 4: "All Through the Night" (1942, Vincent Sherman). ♦ Repertory nights. Jan. 10-11 at 6:30: "Sawdust and Tinsel" (1953, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Jan. 7 at 8:30: "Sensitive Johnson" (2003, Chris Valenti). ♦ Jan. 8-9 and Jan. 12-13 at 7 and 9:30 and Jan. 10-11 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Demonlover" (2002, Olivier Assayas; in French). ♦ Jan. 9 at 8: "À Propos de Nice" (1929-30, Jean Vigo; in French) and "Zéro de Conduite" (1935, Vigo; in French). ♦ Jan. 10 at 6: "L'Atalante" (†). ♦ Jan. 10 at 8: "A Sixth of the World" (1926, Dziga Vertov; silent). ♦ Jan. 11 at 6: "The Eleventh Year" (1928, Vertov; silent). ♦ Jan. 11 at 7:30: "Man with a Movie Camera" (†).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Jan. 7-8 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: The 3-D version of "Dial M for Murder" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Starting Jan. 9 at 1:20, 1:50, 3:40, 4:10, 7, 7:30, 9:20, and 9:50: "The Battle of Algiers" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Jan. 27: "Filmmakers of Our Times," feature films, followed by documentaries about the directors. Jan. 13 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Head Against the Wall" (1959, Georges Franju; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Jan. 22: "Das Neue Kino," new German films. All films are in German. Jan. 8 at 2 and Jan. 9 at 8:30: "Wintersleepers" (1997, Tom Tykwer). ♦ Jan. 8 at 8:30 and Jan. 9 at 2: "Grill Point" (2002, Andreas Dresen). ♦ Jan. 10 at 9: "Red Love" (1982, Rosa von Praunheim). ♦ Jan. 11 at 2: "Bye Bye America" (1994, Jan Schütte). ♦ Through Jan. 18: A Victor Sjöström retrospective. Most films are silent, and some have Swedish intertitles, which will be translated simultaneously. Jan. 8 at 4:30 and Jan. 10 at 7: "A Dangerous Pledge" (1920). ♦ Jan. 8 at 6:30 and Jan. 10 at 5: "Love's Crucible" (1922). ♦ Jan. 9 at 4: "A Man There Was" (1917) and "Name the Man" (1924). ♦ Jan. 9 at 6:30: "The Wind" (†). ♦ Jan. 10 at 3: "The Outlaw and His Wife" (†). ♦ Jan. 11 at 6: "The Girl from the Marsh Croft" (1917). ♦ Jan. 12 at 6: "The Monastery of Sendomir" (1920). ♦ Through Feb. 29: "The Hidden God: Film and Faith." Jan. 10 at 1: "Voyage to Italy" (1953, Roberto Rossellini). ♦ Jan. 11 at 4: "The Night of the Hunter" (†).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

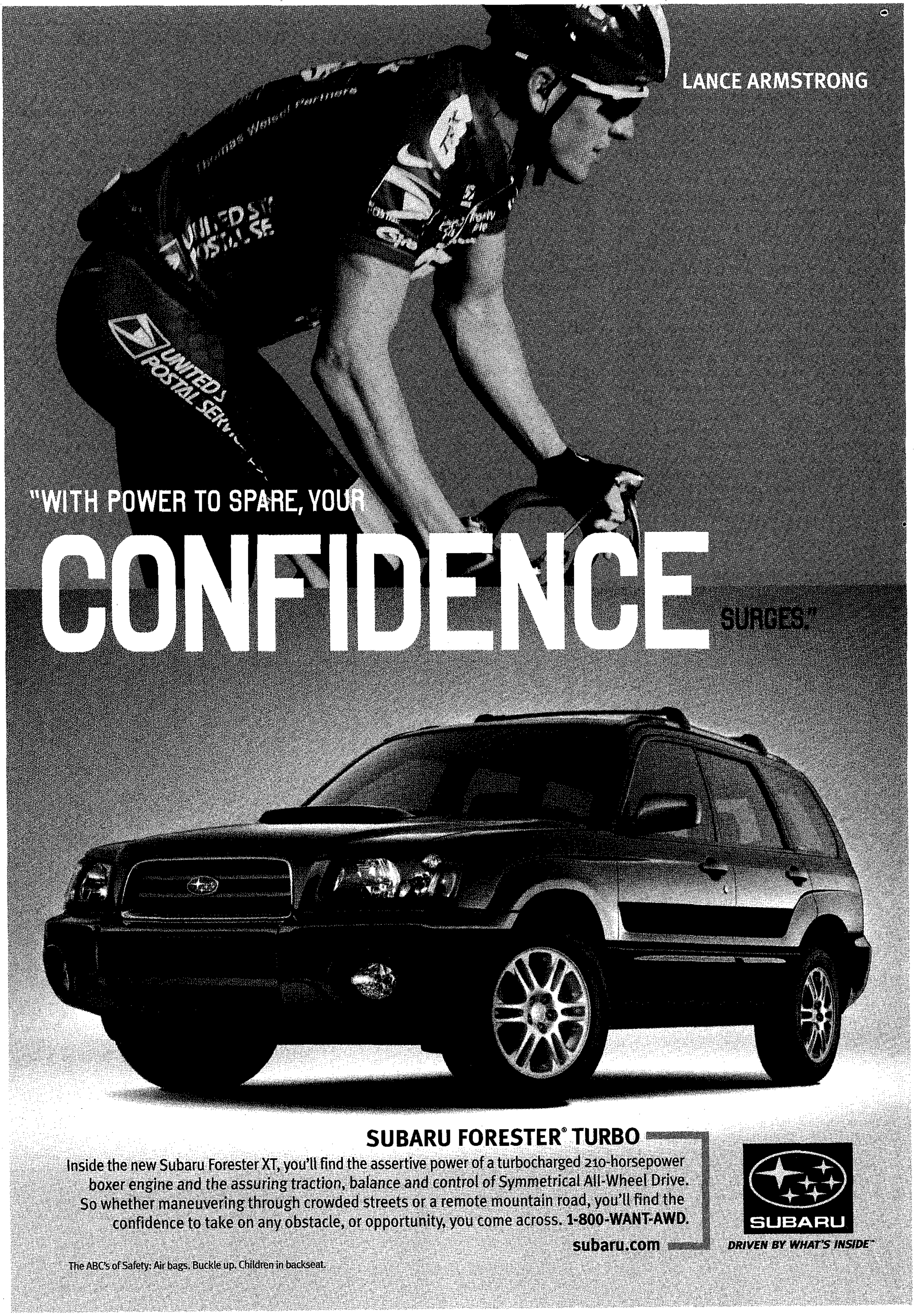
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Through Jan. 14: A Federico Fellini retrospective. All films are in Italian. Jan. 7 at 7: "City of Women" (1980). ♦ Jan. 9 at 7 and Jan. 10 at 3: "And the Ship Sails On" (1983). ♦ Jan. 10 at 7: "La Strada" (1954).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Jan. 9-10: "Poltergeist" (1982, Tobe Hooper).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Jan. 12: "Not of This Earth: Sci-Fi Unbound." Jan. 7 at 1 and 3 and Jan. 11 at 9:15: "Body Snatchers" (1993, Abel Ferrara). ♦ Jan. 7 at 8:30 and Jan. 11 at 7: "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1978, Philip Kaufman). ♦ Jan. 8 at 1: "Lifeforce" (1985, Tobe Hooper). ♦ Jan. 8 at 3:15: "Avalon" (†). ♦ Jan. 11 at 5: "Punishment Park" (1971, Peter Watkins). ♦ Jan. 9-10: "Dance on Camera 2003." See www.filmlinc.com for a complete schedule.



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THE
NEW YORKER

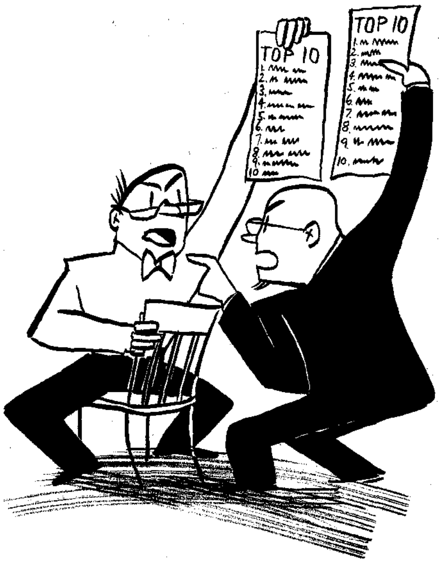
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BEST OF THE "BEST"

As Aristotle said (was it Aristotle? maybe it was Parmenides), Man is the list-making animal. He was dreaming, no doubt, of a list, someday, of the Top Ten Philosophers. Such a list might fall a little short of universal appeal. That cannot be said, though, of the lists of the year's Top Ten Movies and Top Ten Albums (and also, in many publications, of the Top Ten Books, Art Exhibits, Moments in Sports, and so on) that arrive each December, during the week before New Year's. Everyone acts superior to lists (so arbitrary and invidious!), but the act is a bluff. The fact of the matter is basic and ineluctable: we need these lists. The year would not be complete without them. The year would not *make sense* without them.

The first response to the appearance of the ten-best lists is simple gratitude. It is good to know that someone has been paying attention. Once upon a time, you had at least heard the names of pretty much all the albums and movies that came out. Today, a visit to Tower Records or the Virgin Megastore is an invitation to vertigo. It's not just that you don't recognize ninety per cent of the stuff for sale. You don't even recognize the categories. Electronica, Techno-House, Alternative Country, IDM (it stands for Intelligent Dance Music, as opposed, evidently, to the other kind). There are rows of bins containing Christian-rap CDs, and people are actually looking through them. You need, you realize, a list, and in exactly the same way that a drowning sailor needs a life preserver. The people who make these annual lists, the daily or weekly reviewers, have crossed the great sea of packaged amusement, pathos, and distraction for us, and they have emerged, clutching in their hands just ten plastic jewel cases. *Here*, they say; *these are the best*. We can imagine the nausea and entertainment fatigue they must have suffered during their twelve-month ordeal. We admire their grit and their pluck, and we salute them.

Of course, like all things that pretend to perfect transparency, a top-ten list is the result of juggling and calculation. It looks straightforward: ten numbers, ten titles. Of the (at least) five hundred movies released in the United States in 2003, these just happen to be the best ten, and in this order. (Critics who present their top-ten lists alphabetically are dodging their own bullets. If ten movies are clearly superior to the four hundred and ninety others, why would it be élitist to make further distinctions? If you can get a top ten, why can't you get a top five, and a top three, and a top one?) But best-ness isn't the only factor that goes into the making of an annual ten-best list. After all, what does every critic who makes a ten-best list secretly wish? That his or her list will be the best ten-best list. The list itself has to be fun, interesting, *good*.



For example, it would not do to list ten movies all of which star Nicole Kidman. Pure eclecticism is to be avoided; it duplicates the dizzying randomness of the megastore experience. But a good list displays a healthy, big-tent ecumenism, and an expansive tolerance with respect to *Billboard* rankings and box-office gross. In a mass-market publication, a movie list should contain one foreign-language film that few readers have heard of. (Two might look effete.) Uniqueness is the desideratum here. A critic does not want to see his or her "surprise" item turning up as the "surprise" on another critic's list. Conversely, in an "alternative" or highbrow publication the movie list needs one blockbuster—one film the critic liked despite

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

the fact that everyone else liked it. The chief thing is to run an item or two against the grain of the readership. It is depressing to read a list of movies and realize that you missed all of them, but it is just as disappointing to discover that you have seen every one. You want to know that there are still a few truffles left in the box.

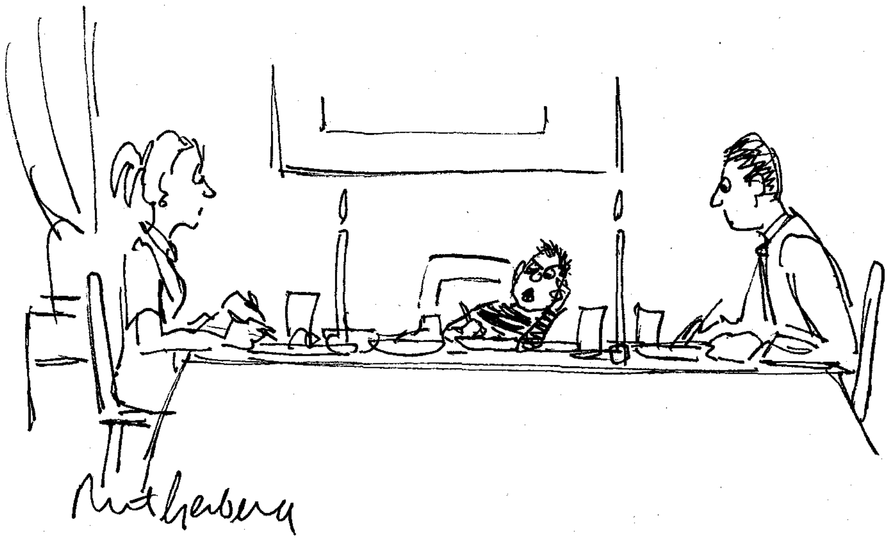
Above all, a good top-ten list should convey authority. Not quite Olympian authority, maybe; readers should be able to argue with it, to dissent a bit at the margins. But, ideally, the list should suggest a finality of judgment: life is short; your time is precious; spend it on these. It has to be said that, in this regard, there are trends in end-of-the-year list-making that people concerned about the future of our civilization ought to view with alarm.

The main trouble is the practice of publishing multiple ten-best lists. The credibility of any list is naturally weakened by the presence of an alternative list right next to it. This year, the *Times* ran three lists of the ten best movies, one by each of its chief film critics. The result was a total of twenty-four top-ten movies. Only six movies appeared on more than one list, and not one appeared on all three. What are we to think? That there was not a single movie that three basically like-minded persons writing for a mainstream paper could agree on as an obvious top ten? Then the paper ran a piece in which the critics quarrelled with each other over the rest of the year's movies. It was demoralizing, like watching your parents argue: of course they do, but you don't need to know about it.

As everyone is aware, pop music has become so fragmented that it is a wonder the industry survives. Product is designed for thinner and thinner demographic slices—eighteen-to-twenty, twenty-to-twenty-two—and for musical sub-tastes (Hardcore Techno, Minimal Techno, etc.) within each niche. Then the cohort moves on, and the product becomes obsolete. This extreme state-of-nature condition is reflected in the year-end lists. The *Times* published three lists of the ten best pop-music albums. No title appeared on all three lists; three appeared on two lists, leaving twenty-seven top-ten albums. (If you were born before 1980 and have been doing something with your time besides downloading pirated music, you were lucky if you recognized the names of five of the artists.) The Washington *Post* ran four lists of the ten best pop albums. Total number of albums named: thirty-eight. You reach for the Dramamine.

The publication of multiple ten-best lists is probably a well-intentioned effort to embrace the principle of pluralism, and to make a democratic acknowledgment that taste is, after all, a personal and subjective matter. The effort is mistaken. Pluralism and democracy are fine things, but they have no place in the evaluation and consumption of pop culture, especially today, when, all around us, the sea is rising. The critic is the dolphin who can take us over the waves. The image is from Plato, or, if it wasn't Plato, one of the other top guys.

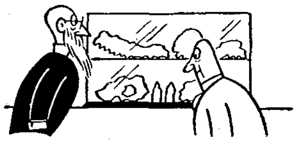
—*Louis Menand*



"How come they don't have mad-cauliflower disease?"

FOSSIL DEPT.

HERE TODAY



Not many people know this, but there was a plan, in the nineteen-fifties, to sheathe the American Museum of Natural History in aluminum—a city block putting on the foil, in the name of progress. Visitors to the neighborhood will note that this scheme did not get far. Still, change has come to the old museum over the years, as it does to all things. A spiffy planetarium, a bluer whale, a proliferation of gift shops: for better and for worse, science's curatorial preferences evolve, and wonderful enterprises and exhibits get moved aside, thrown out, covered up.

The latest casualty is an outfit called Micropaleontology Press, or Micro Press, which, in various incarnations, has been a tenant in the museum since 1942. It originated in the thirties, with the geologist and grant-application wizard Brooks Ellis, as a project to catalogue the fossilized remains of single-cell organisms, such as foraminifera, that live and, more significantly, die in the sea, accumulating on the ocean floor like dust. It is not a vast exaggeration to say that microfossils form the surface of the earth; the Great Pyramids and the White Cliffs of Dover, for example, are made up of trillions of them. For a time, the project was a beneficiary of the Works Progress Administration, employing about two hundred hard-luck illustrators, writers, typesetters, binders, and archivists to make and collate records of microorganisms. They produced, among other things, thousands of original, meticulous drawings—of *Lepidocyclina tournoveri, Cristellaria latifrons*, and so forth—whose marvellous forms summon to mind oysters, pinecones, and life on the planet Mongo. The museum granted Ellis's operation a sprawling space on the main floor, and pretty much left it alone, as it morphed into a self-supporting publishing enterprise, thriving on subscriptions and consulting fees from oil companies. (Microfossils are deadeye indicators of oil, and also, appropriately, of climate change.) It produced the bimonthly journal *Micro-*

paleontology and also annual updates of the catalogues. But in recent years, as the oil companies devised other prospecting techniques, and as the museum cultivated new endeavors, the micropaleontology department, which in fact was never a real department, moved downstairs to the basement and began to shrink, until it learned, last July, that it had to vacate its lair for good by the end of the year.

John Van Couvering

So there was John Van Couvering, Micro Press's editor-in-chief, a few days before Christmas, presiding over the dissolution. "The museum granted us the space," he said. "Now it's withdrawing the space." Van Couvering is a spry seventy-two, white-haired and bluejeaned, a geologist by training, who spent five years working with Louis Leakey in East Africa. He's run Micro Press since 1978. Were his office to be sealed in amber or dipped whole in a tar pit and uncovered thousands of years later by enterprising anthropologists, it would appear to have been an untidy place, characterized by boxes of journals and photostat sheets, decrepit schoolhouse furniture, and a copse of overgrown spider plants—science as it was practiced at the end of the second millennium. There would also be the remains of a graduate student, with iPod earphones. Lost to future generations would be the smell of old paper and Van Couvering's explanation: "We're engaged in an intelligent destruction of our files."

Van Couvering gave a quick tour of the premises, pointing out regions of the basement that once belonged to micropaleontology. "We've condensed," he said. "This used to be our storage area. The museum took it away from us. Now it's a frozen-tissue lab. And in here"—a darkened doorway—"is a RAID array: a whole lot of cheap computers, and they put 'em together for DNA analysis. In the past, the 'old museum' had the space, and the 'new museum' had the money." Now the new museum has both.

The heart of the place was a bank of cabinets containing files and index cards on all the foraminifera, ostracods, and diatoms known to man. The task at hand was to save the best and toss the rest. Van Couvering was keeping the drawings. The good news, for nostalgists and foraminiferaphiles, is that he has reconstituted Micro Press as a not-for-profit corporation and has found a new home for it on lower Fifth Avenue, which was where many of the files were headed.

Van Couvering leafed through an annual report from the thirties and stopped at a page depicting a couple of dozen artists at their desks: eyeshades, magnifying glasses, tweed. "All of science is changing," he said. "Modernizing science is all very well, but you don't want to lose the past. Look at these drawings! I wish I'd known the people who made them."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

COLLECTORS SQUISHED

In retrospect, it almost has the ring of a creative-problem-solving challenge: can you fit more than fifty industrial-size trash bags' worth of junk in a ten-by-ten room? As we now know, thanks to Patrice Lumumba Moore, the answer is yes—but barely. Moore, who is forty-three, returned from the corner store on the Saturday after Christmas and squeezed, as usual, past the nearly barricaded door to his tiny but stuffed-to-the-ceiling Bronx apartment, which implausibly housed perhaps the city's largest and most varied private collection of magazines: *Advertising Age*, *Ebony*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Penthouse*. Moments later, he heard an ominous noise overhead. It was the beginning of a domestic avalanche.

"Books were falling everywhere, and I tried to catch some—that's where I cut my knees," Moore recalled last week, from a bed in the intensive-care unit at St. Barnabas Hospital. "I had crates up top. Had my books in crates—you know, them metal crates. I'm lucky I was standing up. If I was down, I'd have been crushed. So I'm a lucky guy." Moore was trapped by his own abundant belongings for two days, before a team of neighbors and firemen, with the help of a crowbar, rescued him, and discovered that he was not merely an eccentric pack rat; he had apparently never thrown anything out.

"Compulsive hoarding" was how the *Times* described Moore's behavior. "Disposophobia" is Ron Alford's preferred term. "It's an affliction, it's really a disease," Alford said last week. "It starts in the head of the people and manifests somewhere on the floor and on horizontal surfaces in their dwelling units." Alford, who is sixty-three, runs Disaster Masters, Inc., a Queens-based "crisis management" service specializing in, among other things, abnormal clutter. He is the author of such articles as "How to Manage Your Disaster Recovery Misery Index" and "Counter-Terrorism for Consumers Against Big Business with Strategic Media," and he is now at work on a book called "Disposophobia: The Fear of Getting Rid of Stuff."

Alford had recently returned from an emergency decluttering mission in San Francisco. "A guy's wife left him," he explained. "She moved out of the house because the bed couldn't be used, you know, for its intended purpose." Now, thanks to Ron, the couple was back together. As for Moore's case, Alford was unimpressed.

"Oh, it's chump change," he said. "I'm not being derogatory about it. It's just that this is what I do for a living. What doctors do for broken bones and stuff I do for people who suffer massive clutter." He paused a moment, then added, "And I only deal with people who are at least a 5-plus on the Clutter Scale." (Alford assigns all potential clients a score between 1 and 10, using photographic evidence.) "I'm on my way to the Lower East Side right now to go look at a project where this gal is up to her armpits in stuff," he said. "And she just doesn't know how to deal with it, but we do. We know that the *National Geographics* are never going to be worth anything."

To those less familiar with today's messmakers, Moore called to mind Homer and Langley Collyer, the Hermit Hoarders of Harlem, who in 1947 were discovered dead in their Fifth Avenue mansion amid a hundred and eighty tons of car parts, musical instruments, newspapers, and orange peels. The Collyers, though, were famously shy of publicity. Not so Patrice Moore. "Is there big money in this?" he asked hopefully, still on his back, covered by a hospital blanket. "It's a big story, right?" A St. Barnabas staffer had just promised to make copies of Tuesday's *Post* for him—the headline was "BOOKWORM SQUISHED."

"Fifty bags," Moore said, shaking his head. "There's still more. I got some stuff in the closet. I don't know if they checked the closet." He amassed his collection of magazines, he explained, simply by calling up circulation departments and requesting subscriptions—which he never paid for. "*Essence*, *In Style*—they know me," he said. "All the magazines know me. *Vogue*. *Vogue* know me, too. *Lucky*."

Moore was hoping to stay on at St. Barnabas for another week. He was enjoying the bedside visits: "I thank all the magazines, all the newspapers." When he got out, he said, he was planning to use his newfound fame to jump-start a rap career. "I do beat box," he said. He closed his eyes and began making a series of percussive noises with his mouth. A hospital employee came in to see if everything was O.K. "I learned that from Biz Markie and Doug E. Fresh," Moore said.

He was less clear about his future hoarding plans. "I retired from the books" was all he'd say. "The books almost got me." Should he run into trouble, he might give Disaster Masters a call. Ron Alford offers one-on-one coaching, including diet modification and even hypnosis. "We give them some serious mental tools to use so that they don't repopulate their place with a bunch of shit," Alford said.

—*Ben McGrath*

INK
STILL HAPPENING

When the raffish Winchell-era press agent Eddie Jaffe died, in March, at the age of eighty-nine, the consensus was that there went the last of his kind. Then, in December, Leonard Traube, another New York publicity man of the old school, died, at eighty-three, and that pretty much seemed to be that. As it turns out, flaks are a heartier breed than we thought. Gene Weber, who is eighty-eight, is still open for business and still sending out typewritten press releases, such as a recent one announcing a stunt at a restaurant called the Pump, involving the "largest, biggest, hugest bowl of soup ever served in a restaurant—over 400 bowls of soup in one soup bowl." If asked, Weber will concede that, in his prime, he was "the No. 1 Broadway press agent for newspaper columns" and "the No. 1 contributor to Walter Winchell," not to mention "the No. 1 creator of events, or light news, for television—nobody even came close." He credits his success to a simple rule: Make things happen.

Since 1946, he has attracted a far-flung, if fluid, group of clients, including Eddie Cantor, Buddy Hackett, Sarah Vaughan, Merv Griffin, Eddie Fisher, Louis Armstrong, Lenny Bruce, Joe Namath, and Nelson Rockefeller, plus dozens of restaurants and night spots and a racetrack or two. Weber was Edith Piaf's American press agent, and he handled Mike Nichols and Elaine May early in their careers, when they were appearing at a basement club called Down in the Depths. Winchell once called Weber "the finest writer of one-liners since Will Rogers," a talent that culminated in a bogus last will and testament that Weber devised for Henny Youngman to read at a press conference on his eighty-eighth birthday, in 1994: "To Madonna I leave my body—if she can't wait, she can have it sooner. . . . To my nephew, Irving, who's always asked me to mention him in my will: Hello, Irving."

Weber explained the other day, "The key to making things happen is to take your client, who may not even deserve to be in the papers, see what he has to work with, and, even if it's not much, rub a few ideas together till something hopefully catches on fire." A few years ago, when Weber was handling Gallagher's Steak House, he had Jake LaMotta put on a cutaway, a stovepipe hat, and a fake beard, and recite the Gettysburg Address in the restaurant's dining room, on Lincoln's birthday. But of the hundreds of stunts that Weber has cooked up—the Super Bowl Sunday "Football Widows" party, the Mother's Day beauty makeover for Holocaust survivors—he is proudest of his scheme to get publicity for a night club in Queens by billing a roller-skating chimpanzee above a comic named Harvey Stone, and having Stone file a complaint with the American Guild of Variety Artists.

After years of late-night tummling at Lindy's, Toots Shor, and the Copa, Weber now makes things happen from a two-bedroom apartment in Forest Hills, which he shares with his wife, Dorothy, and their fourteen-year-old bichon frise, Murphy. Weber is wiry and brittle-looking, with longish white hair, thick eyebrows, and watchful eyes. He has a gravelly voice, and his wardrobe is sporty. In the morning, he sits in the kitchen at a manual typewriter and composes press releases for his clients—a few restaurants, a local beauty parlor, and a Palm Beach bandleader named Dick Prentiss. These are punchy and ingratiating documents, marked by exclamation points, ellipses, and gnomic turns of phrase. "I do English in a different way—grammatically incorrect can be much more devastating," Weber said, citing a favorite slogan: "Gotcha? No! (Well, we'll keep trying!)" In the afternoon, Weber allows himself a couple of Manhattans. "Sometimes I take a dividend, but it's never more than two and a half cocktails," he said. "I'm a temperance guy."

Relaxing in his living room late one afternoon recently, Weber said he sometimes worries that his chosen profession "has no nobility to it." And he regrets some of the compromises he has made along the way, in particular having come up with one-liners to help Walter Winchell plug Joe McCarthy. "I really feel a little bit corrupt about that, but I also feel that it's a normal thing to do—to please the boss," he said. Still, Weber remains proud that Winchell once touted him as "the best get-in-the-papers guy I know." Taking a sip of his Manhattan, he said, "Some people are great novelists, some are great critics—they're naturals. In a certain way—not to be immodest—you could say I'm a natural, too." Weber paused, sighed, and shook his head. "I am being immodest, there's no question about it."

—*Adam Green*

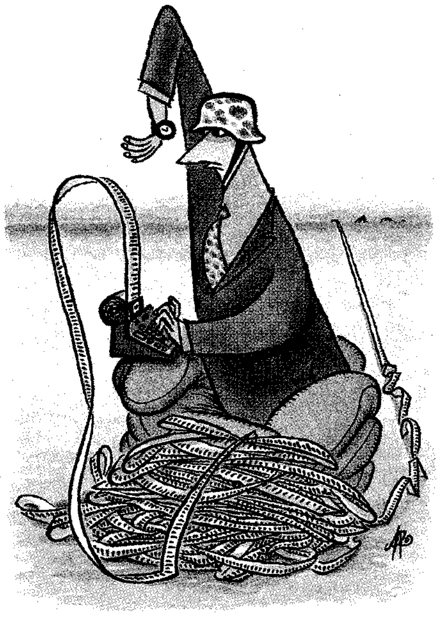
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
ARMY, INC.

If there were an annual prize for the world's most despised company, Halliburton would have been the runaway favorite in 2003. It was the designated villain for those who believe that the United States went to war for oil. Its connection to Vice-President Dick Cheney, who ran the company between 1995 and 2000, inspired cries of cronyism when it won the contract to repair Iraq's oil fields without submitting a bid. And its subsidiary Kellogg Brown & Root, or K.B.R., was recently labelled a war "profiteer," after Pentagon auditors accused it of overcharging the government on a contract to supply oil to the Iraqi people. (Last week, the Pentagon took away that contract.)

The conspiracy theories and corruption claims make for great headlines, but they miss the point. There's little evidence of chicanery in the bidding process for Iraq contracts, and no serious person believes that the United States launched a war for Halliburton. The worrisome thing isn't what Halliburton and other big contractors are supposedly doing behind the scenes. It's what they're doing in plain sight. National defense, the blood-and-iron burden of government, is increasingly becoming a province of the private sector. Our leaders seem intent on building a Milo Minderbinder army.

Once upon a time, the military was as top-down, self-sufficient, and self-contained an organization as you could imagine. Now it's more like a complex partnership between the armed forces and a select group of private companies; one half expects to see the C.E.O.s of Halliburton and Bechtel on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The military once ran its own mess halls, handled its own communications, and maintained its own weapons systems. No longer. Today, K.B.R. has a ten-year, multibillion-dollar contract to provide the military with "logistical support"; it does the laundry, cleans the offices, builds base camps, maintains roads, and runs communications. Another company, Dyncorp, flies defoliation missions for the United States in Colombia, provides security for President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, and virtually runs the Naval Air Warfare Center. Private employees were even responsible for keeping F-117 stealth fighters and Global Hawk drones in the air during the Iraq war.

To be sure, civilian involvement in military operations is nothing new—the French Army took taxicabs to the front in 1914—and private contractors have historically played a greater role in the United States than in Europe. But the scale and scope of what we're seeing today is unprecedented. Even as, in the nineties, the size of the armed forces shrank precipitously, the number of outside contract workers kept growing. By some accounts, half of all defense-related jobs are now done by private employees.



ARNOLD ROTH

Why the change? First, the notion that government is fundamentally inefficient and unproductive has become conventional wisdom. It had always had a certain hold on the American imagination, but it gained strength with the ascendancy of conservatism in the eighties and nineties. Second, Washington fell for the era's biggest business fad: outsourcing. For most of the twentieth century, successful corporations were supposed to look like General Motors: versatile, vertically integrated, huge. But by the nineties vertical integration had given way to "core competency": do only what you do best, and pay someone else to do the rest. The Pentagon decided that it should concentrate on its core competency—"warfighting."

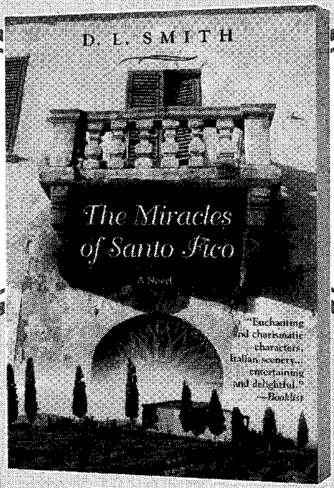
It's a tidy picture: the Army becomes a lean, mean killing machine, while civilians peel the potatoes and clean the latrines. But there's a reason that companies like General Motors existed in the first place. Effective as outsourcing can be, doing things in-house is often easier and quicker. You avoid the expense and hassle of haggling, and retain operational reliability and control, which is especially important to the military. No contract can guarantee that private employees will stick around in a combat zone. After the Iraq war, some contractors refused assignments to dangerous parts of the country. That left American troops sitting in the mud, and without hot food. Last month, after two South Korean subcontractors who had been repairing the Iraqi power grid were killed by guerrillas north of Baghdad, sixty of their colleagues just up and quit.

Outsourcing works well when there's genuine competition among suppliers—that's when the virtues of the private sector come into play. But in the market for big military contracts the bidders tend to be the usual few suspects, so that the game resembles the American auto or steel industries before Japan and Germany became major players: more comfortable than competitive. Sometimes the lack of competition is explicit: many of the contracts for rebuilding Iraq were handed out on a no-bid basis. And many of them are "cost-plus" contracts. This means that the contractors' profit is a percentage of their costs, which gives them an incentive to keep those costs high. That's hardly a recipe for efficiency or rigor.

The right conditions for outsourcing, then, seem not to exist in the Beltway or on the battlefield. Labelling a function "private" doesn't mean that it will automatically be done quicker or better. After all, the Defense Energy Support Center, a government agency, figured out how to import gasoline from Kuwait for about a dollar a gallon while Halliburton was charging $2.27. Many of the key employees at places like K.B.R. are former military men; if they can do the job in civvies, they should be able to do it in uniform, too. Don't outsource the iron until you can outsource the blood.

—*James Surowiecki*

"A delightful fable, told with wit and grace."
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)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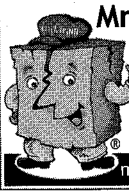

COMMERCE & CULTURE

BIG AND BAD

How the S.U.V. ran over automotive safety.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

In the summer of 1996, the Ford Motor Company began building the Expedition, its new, full-sized S.U.V., at the Michigan Truck Plant, in the Detroit suburb of Wayne. The Expedition was essentially the F-150 pickup truck with an extra set of doors and two more rows of seats—and the fact that it was a truck was critical. Cars have to meet stringent fuel-efficiency regulations. Trucks don't. The handling and suspension and braking of cars have to be built to the demanding standards of drivers and passengers. Trucks only have to handle like, well, trucks. Cars are built with what is called unit-body construction. To be light enough to meet fuel standards and safe enough to meet safety standards, they have expensive and elaborately engineered steel skeletons, with built-in crumple zones to absorb the impact of a crash. Making a truck is a lot more rudimentary. You build a rectangular steel frame. The engine gets bolted to the front. The seats get bolted to the middle. The body gets lowered over the top. The result is heavy and rigid and not particularly safe. But it's an awfully inexpensive way to build an automobile. Ford had planned to sell the Expedition for thirty-six thousand dollars, and its best estimate was that it could build one for twenty-four thousand—which, in the automotive industry, is a terrifically high profit margin. Sales, the company predicted, weren't going to be huge. After all, how many Americans could reasonably be expected to pay a twelve-thousand-dollar premium for what was essentially a dressed-up truck? But Ford executives decided that the Expedition would be a highly profitable niche product. They were half right. The "highly profitable" part turned out to be true. Yet, almost from the moment Ford's big new S.U.V.s rolled off the assembly line in Wayne, there was nothing "niche" about the Expedition.

Ford had intended to split the assembly line at the Michigan Truck Plant between the Expedition and the Ford F-150 pickup. But, when the first flood of orders started coming in for the Expedition, the factory was entirely given over to S.U.V.s. The orders kept mounting. Assembly-line workers were put on sixty- and seventy-hour weeks. Another night shift was added. The plant was now running twenty-four hours a day, six days a week. Ford executives decided to build a luxury version of the Expedition, the Lincoln Navigator. They bolted a new grille on the Expedition, changed a few body panels, added some sound insulation, took a deep breath, and charged forty-five thousand dollars—and soon Navigators were flying out the door nearly as fast as Expeditions. Before long, the Michigan Truck Plant was the most profitable of Ford's fifty-three assembly plants. By the late nineteen-nineties, it had become the most profitable factory of any industry in the world. In 1998, the Michigan Truck Plant grossed eleven billion dollars, almost as much as McDonald's made that year. Profits were $3.7 billion. Some factory workers, with overtime, were making two hundred thousand dollars a year. The demand for Expeditions and Navigators was so insatiable that even when a blizzard hit the Detroit region in January of 1999—burying the city in snow, paralyzing the airport, and stranding hundreds of cars on the freeway—Ford officials got on their radios and commandeered parts bound for other factories so that the Michigan Truck Plant assembly line wouldn't slow for a moment. The factory that had begun as just another assembly plant had become the company's crown jewel.

In the history of the automotive industry, few things have been quite as unexpected as the rise of the S.U.V. Detroit is a town of engineers, and engineers like to believe that there is some connection between the success of a vehicle

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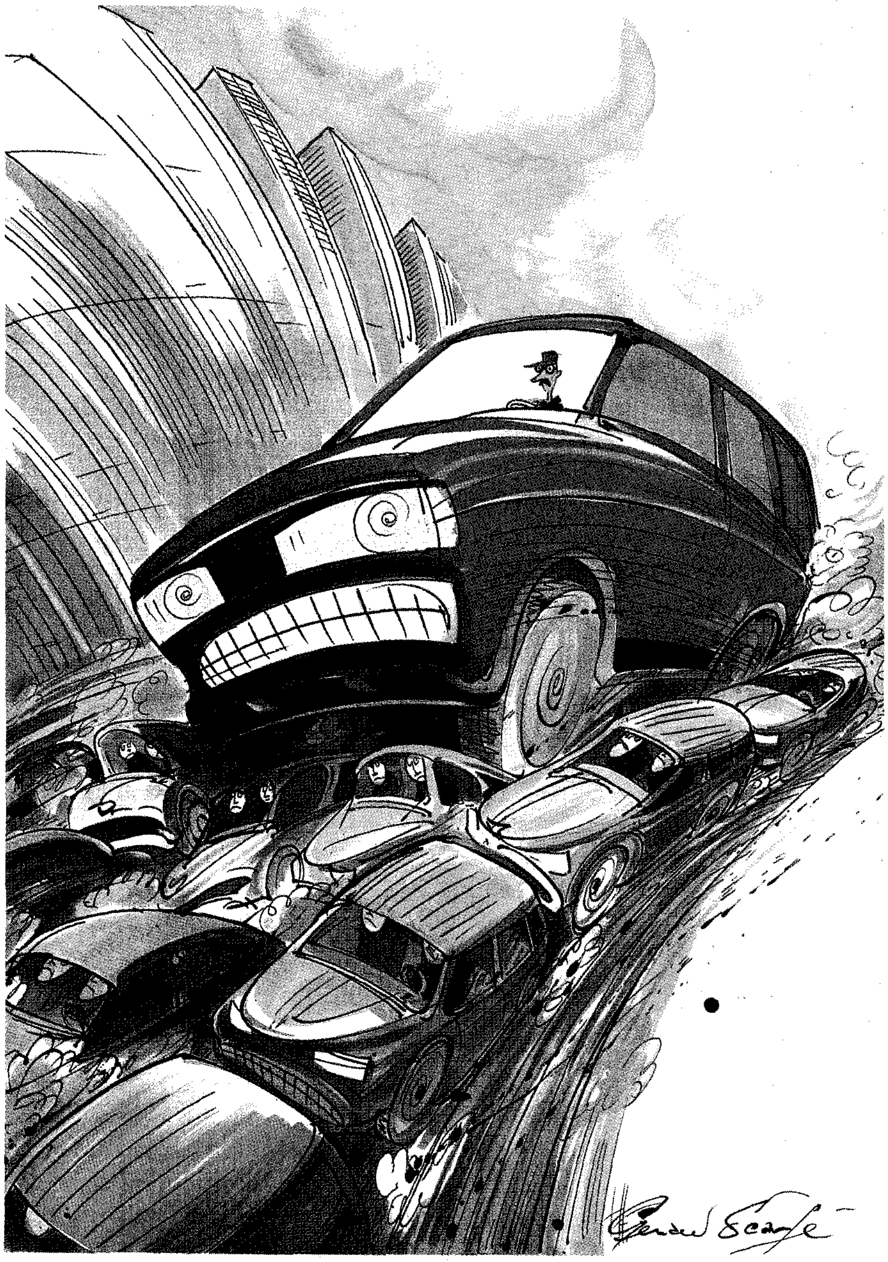
and its technical merits. But the S.U.V. boom was like Apple’s bringing back the Macintosh, dressing it up in colorful plastic, and suddenly creating a new market. It made no sense to them. Consumers said they liked four-wheel drive. But the overwhelming majority of consumers don’t need four-wheel drive. S.U.V. buyers said they liked the elevated driving position. But when, in focus groups, industry marketers probed further, they heard things that left them rolling their eyes. As Keith Bradsher writes in “High and Mighty”—perhaps the most important book about Detroit since Ralph Nader’s “Unsafe at Any Speed”—what consumers said was “If the vehicle is up high, it’s easier to see if something is hiding underneath or lurking behind it.” Bradsher brilliantly captures the mixture of bafflement and contempt that many auto executives feel toward the customers who buy their S.U.V.s. Fred J. Schaafsma, a top engineer for General Motors, says, “Sport-utility owners tend to be more like ‘I wonder how people view me,’ and are more willing to trade off flexibility or functionality to get that.” According to Bradsher, internal industry market research concluded that S.U.V.s tend to be bought by people who are insecure, vain, self-centered, and self-absorbed, who are frequently nervous about their marriages, and who lack confidence in their driving skills. Ford’s S.U.V. designers took their cues from seeing “fashionably dressed women wearing hiking boots or even work boots while walking through expensive malls.” Toyota’s top marketing executive in the United States, Bradsher writes, loves to tell the story of how at a focus group in Los Angeles “an elegant woman in the group said that she needed her full-sized Lexus LX 470 to drive up over the curb and onto lawns to park at large parties in Beverly Hills.” One of Ford’s senior marketing executives was even blunter: “The only time those S.U.V.s are going to be off-road is when they miss the driveway at 3 A.M.”



The S.U.V. boom happened when drivers decided to treat accidents as inevitable.

The truth, underneath all the rationalizations, seemed to be that S.U.V. buyers thought of big, heavy vehicles as safe: they found comfort in being surrounded by so much rubber and steel. To the engineers, of course, that didn’t make any sense, either: if consumers really wanted something that was big and heavy and comforting, they ought to buy minivans, since minivans, with their unit-body construction, do much better in accidents than S.U.V.s. (In a thirty-five-m.p.h. crash test, for instance, the driver of a Cadillac Escalade—the G.M. counterpart to the Lincoln Navigator—has a sixteen-per-cent chance of a life-threatening head injury, a twenty-per-cent chance of a life-threatening chest injury, and a thirty-five-per-cent chance of a leg injury. The same numbers in a Ford Windstar minivan—a vehicle engineered from the ground up, as opposed to simply being bolted onto a pickup-truck frame—are, respectively, two per cent, four per cent, and one per cent.) But this desire for safety wasn’t a rational calculation. It was a *feeling*. Over the past decade, a number of major automakers in America have relied on the services of a French-born cultural anthropologist, G. Clotaire Rapaille, whose speciality is getting beyond the rational—what he calls “cortex”—impressions of consumers and tapping into their deeper, “reptilian” responses. And what Rapaille concluded from countless, intensive sessions with car buyers was that when S.U.V. buyers thought about safety they were thinking about something that reached into their deepest unconscious. “The No. 1 feeling is that everything surrounding you should be round and soft, and should give,” Rapaille told me. “There should be air bags

"Damn, I think I ate Plan B."

everywhere. Then there's this notion that you need to be up high. That's a contradiction, because the people who buy these S.U.V.s know at the cortex level that if you are high there is more chance of a rollover. But at the reptilian level they think that if I am bigger and taller I'm safer. You feel secure because you are higher and dominate and look down. That you can look down is psychologically a very powerful notion. And what was the key element of safety when you were a child? It was that your mother fed you, and there was warm liquid. That's why cupholders are absolutely crucial for safety. If there is a car that has no cupholder, it is not safe. If I can put my coffee there, if I can have my food, if everything is round, if it's soft, and if I'm high, then I feel safe. It's amazing that intelligent, educated women will look at a car and the first thing they will look at is how many cupholders it has." During the design of Chrysler's PT Cruiser, one of the things Rapaille learned was that car buyers felt unsafe when they thought that an outsider could easily see inside their vehicles. So Chrysler made the back window of the PT Cruiser smaller. Of course, making windows smaller—and thereby reducing visibility—makes driving *more* dangerous, not less so. But that's the puzzle of what has happened to the automobile world: feeling safe has become more important than actually being safe.

One day this fall, I visited the automobile-testing center of Consumers Union, the organization that publishes *Consumer Reports*. It is tucked away in the woods, in south-central Connecticut, on the site of the old Connecticut Speedway. The facility has two skid pads to measure cornering, a long straightaway for braking tests, a meandering "handling" course that winds around the back side of the track, and an accident-avoidance obstacle course made out of a row of orange cones. It is headed by a trim, white-haired Englishman named David Champion, who previously worked as an engineer with Land Rover and with Nissan. On the day of my visit, Champion set aside two vehicles: a silver 2003 Chevrolet TrailBlazer—an enormous five-thousand-pound S.U.V.—and a shiny blue two-seater Porsche Boxster convertible.

We started with the TrailBlazer. Champion warmed up the Chevrolet with a few quick circuits of the track, and then drove it hard through the twists and turns of the handling course. He sat in the bucket seat with his back straight and his arms almost fully extended, and drove with practiced grace: every movement smooth and relaxed and unhurried. Champion, as an engineer, did not much like the TrailBlazer. "Cheap interior, cheap plastic," he said, batting the dashboard with his hand. "It's a little bit heavy, cumbersome. Quiet. Bit wallowy, side to side. Doesn't feel that secure. Accelerates heavily. Once it gets going, it's got decent power. Brakes feel a bit spongy." He turned onto the straightaway and stopped a few hundred yards from the obstacle course.

Measuring accident avoidance is a key part of the Consumers Union evaluation. It's a simple setup. The driver has to navigate his vehicle through two rows of cones eight feet wide and sixty feet long. Then he has to steer hard to the left, guiding the vehicle through a gate set off to the side, and immediately swerve hard back to the right, and enter a second sixty-foot corridor of cones that are parallel to the first set. The idea is to see how fast you can drive through the course without knocking over any cones. "It's like you're driving down a road in suburbia," Champion said. "Suddenly, a kid on a bicycle veers out in front of you. You have to do whatever it takes to avoid the kid. But there's a tractor-trailer coming toward you in the other lane, so you've got to swing back into your own lane as quickly as possible. That's the scenario."

Champion and I put on helmets. He accelerated toward the entrance to the obstacle course. "We do the test without brakes or throttle, so we can just look at handling," Champion said. "I actually take my foot right off the pedals." The car was now moving at forty m.p.h. At that speed, on the smooth tarmac of the raceway, the TrailBlazer was very quiet, and we were seated so high that the road seemed somehow remote. Champion entered the first row of cones. His arms tensed. He jerked the car to the left. The TrailBlazer's tires squealed. I was thrown toward the passenger-side door as the truck's body rolled, then thrown toward Champion as he jerked the TrailBlazer back to the right. My tape recorder went skittering across the cabin. The whole maneuver had taken no more than a few seconds, but it felt as if we had been sailing into a squall. Champion brought the car to a stop. We both looked back: the TrailBlazer had hit the cone at the gate. The kid on the bicycle was probably dead. Champion shook his head. "It's very rubbery. It slides a lot. I'm not getting much communication back from the steering wheel. It feels really ponderous, clumsy. I felt a little bit of tail swing."

I drove the obstacle course next. I started at the conservative speed of thirty-five m.p.h. I got through cleanly. I tried again, this time at thirty-eight m.p.h., and that small increment of speed made a dramatic difference. I made the first left, avoiding the kid on the bicycle. But, when it came time to swerve back to avoid the hypothetical oncoming eighteen-wheeler, I found that I was wrestling with the car. The protests of the tires were jarring. I stopped, shaken. "It wasn't going where you wanted it to go, was it?" Champion said. "Did you feel the weight pulling you sideways? That's what the extra weight that S.U.V.s have tends to do. It pulls you in the wrong direction." Behind us was a string of toppled cones. Getting the TrailBlazer to travel in a straight line, after that sudden diversion, hadn't been easy. "I think you took out a few pedestrians," Champion said with a faint smile.

Next up was the Boxster. The top was down. The sun was warm on my forehead. The car was low to the ground; I had the sense that if I dangled my arm out the window my knuckles would scrape on the tarmac. Standing still, the Boxster didn't feel safe: I could have been sitting in a go-cart. But when I ran it through the handling course I felt that I was in perfect control. On the straightaway, I steadied the Boxster at forty-five m.p.h., and ran it through the obstacle course. I could have balanced a teacup on my knee. At fifty m.p.h., I navigated the left and right turns with what seemed like a twitch of the steering wheel. The tires didn't squeal. The car stayed level. I pushed the Porsche up into the mid-fifties. Every cone was untouched. "Walk in the park!" Champion exclaimed as we pulled to a stop.

Most of us think that S.U.V.s are much safer than sports cars. If you asked the young parents of America whether they would rather strap their infant child in the back seat of the TrailBlazer or the passenger seat of the Boxster, they would choose the TrailBlazer. We feel that way because in the TrailBlazer our chances of surviving a collision with a hypothetical tractor-trailer in the other lane are greater than they are in the Porsche. What we forget, though, is that in the TrailBlazer you're also much more likely to hit the tractor-trailer because you can't get out of the way in time. In the parlance of the automobile world, the TrailBlazer is better at "passive safety." The Boxster is better when it comes to "active safety," which is every bit as important.

Consider the set of safety statistics compiled by Tom Wenzel, a scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, in California, and Marc Ross, a physicist at the University of Michigan. The numbers are expressed in fatalities per million cars, both for drivers of particular models and for the drivers of the cars they hit. (For example, in the first case, for every million Toyota Avalons on the road, forty Avalon drivers die in car accidents every year, and twenty people die in accidents involving Toyota Avalons.) The numbers below have been rounded:

Make / Model	Type	Driver Deaths	Other Deaths	Total
Toyota Avalon	large	40	20	60
Chrysler Town & Country	minivan	31	36	67
Toyota Camry	mid-size	41	29	70
Volkswagen Jetta	subcompact	47	23	70
Ford Windstar	minivan	37	35	72
Nissan Maxima	mid-size	53	26	79
Honda Accord	mid-size	54	27	82
Chevrolet Venture	minivan	51	34	85
Buick Century	mid-size	70	23	93
Subaru Legacy/Outback	compact	74	24	98
Mazda 626	compact	70	29	99
Chevrolet Malibu	mid-size	71	34	105
Chevrolet Suburban	S.U.V.	46	59	105
Jeep Grand Cherokee	S.U.V.	61	44	106
Honda Civic	subcompact	84	25	109
Toyota Corolla	subcompact	81	29	110
Ford Expedition	S.U.V.	55	57	112
GMC Jimmy	S.U.V.	76	39	114
Ford Taurus	mid-size	78	39	117
Nissan Altima	compact	72	49	121
Mercury Marquis	large	80	43	123
Nissan Sentra	subcompact	95	34	129
Toyota 4Runner	S.U.V.	94	43	137
Chevrolet Tahoe	S.U.V.	68	74	141
Dodge Stratus	mid-size	103	40	143
Lincoln Town Car	large	100	47	147
Ford Explorer	S.U.V.	88	60	148
Pontiac Grand Am	compact	118	39	157
Toyota Tacoma	pickup	111	59	171
Chevrolet Cavalier	subcompact	146	41	186
Dodge Neon	subcompact	161	39	199
Pontiac Sunfire	subcompact	158	44	202
Ford F-Series	pickup	110	128	238

Are the best performers the biggest and heaviest vehicles on the road? Not at all. Among the safest cars are the midsize imports, like the Toyota Camry and the Honda Accord. Or consider the extraordinary performance of some subcompacts, like the Volkswagen Jetta. Drivers of the tiny Jetta die at a rate of just forty-seven per million, which is in the same range as drivers of the five-thousand-pound Chevrolet Suburban and almost half that of popular S.U.V. models like the Ford Explorer or the GMC Jimmy. In a head-on crash, an Explorer or a Suburban would crush a Jetta or a Camry. But, clearly, the drivers of Camrys and Jettas are finding a way to avoid head-on crashes with Explorers and Suburbans. The benefits of being nimble—of being in an automobile that's capable of staying out of trouble—are in many cases greater than the benefits of being big.

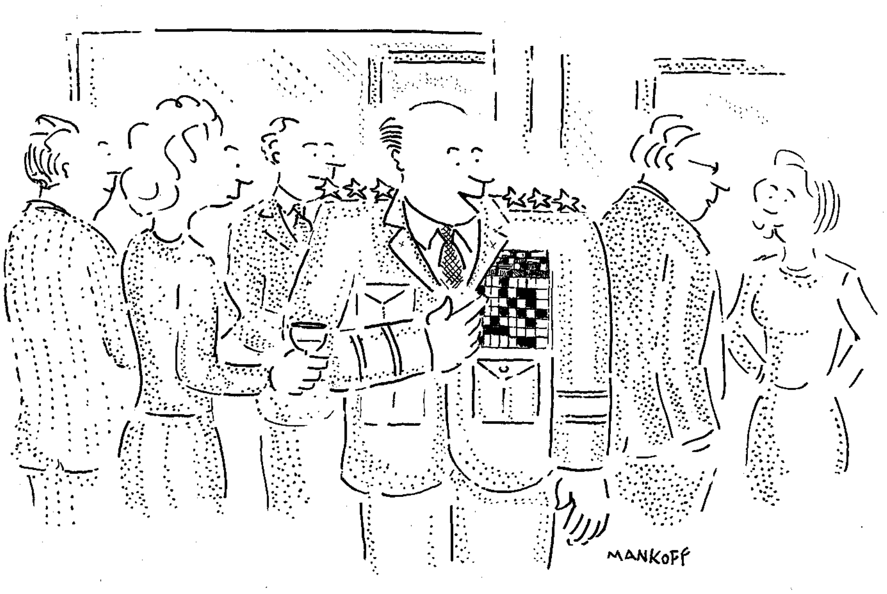
I had another lesson in active safety at the test track when I got in the TrailBlazer with another Consumers Union engineer, and we did three emergency-stopping tests, taking the Chevrolet up to sixty m.p.h. and then slamming on the brakes. It was not a pleasant exercise. Bringing five thousand pounds of rubber and steel to a sudden stop involves lots of lurching, screeching, and protesting. The first time, the TrailBlazer took 146.2 feet to come to a halt, the second time 151.6 feet, and the third time 153.4 feet. The Boxster can come to a complete stop from sixty m.p.h. in about 124 feet. That's a difference of about two car lengths, and it isn't hard to imagine any number of scenarios where two car lengths could mean the difference between life and death.

The S.U.V. boom represents, then, a shift in how we conceive of safety—from active to passive. It's what happens when a larger number of drivers conclude, consciously or otherwise, that the extra thirty feet that the TrailBlazer takes to come to a stop don't really matter, that the tractor-trailer will hit them anyway, and that they are better off treating accidents as inevitable rather than avoidable. "The metric that people use is size," says Stephen Popiel, a vice-president of Millward Brown Goldfarb, in Toronto, one of the leading automotive market-research firms. "The bigger something is, the safer it is. In the consumer's mind, the basic equation is, If I were to take this vehicle and drive it into this brick wall, the more metal there is in front of me the better off I'll be."

This is a new idea, and one largely confined to North America. In Europe and Japan, people think of a safe car as a nimble car. That's why they build cars like the Jetta and the Camry, which are designed to carry out the driver's wishes as directly and efficiently as possible. In the Jetta, the engine is clearly audible. The steering is light and precise. The brakes are crisp. The wheelbase is short enough that the car picks up the undulations of the road. The car is so small and close to the ground, and so dwarfed by other cars on the road, that an intelligent driver is constantly reminded of the necessity of driving safely and defensively. An S.U.V. embodies the opposite logic. The driver is seated as high and far from the road as possible. The vehicle is designed to overcome its environment, not to respond to it. Even four-wheel drive, seemingly the most beneficial feature of the S.U.V., serves to reinforce this isolation. Having the engine provide power to all four wheels, safety experts point out, does nothing to improve braking, although many S.U.V. owners erroneously believe this to be the case. Nor does the feature necessarily make it safer to turn across a slippery surface: that is largely a function of how much friction is generated by the vehicle's tires. All it really does is improve what engineers call tracking—that is, the ability to accelerate without slipping in perilous conditions or in deep snow or mud. Champion says that one of the occasions when he came closest to death was a snowy day, many years ago, just after he had bought a new Range Rover. "Everyone around me was slipping, and I was thinking, *Yeahhh.* And I came to a stop sign on a major road, and I was driving probably twice as fast as I should have been, because I could. I had traction. But I also weighed probably twice as much as most cars. And I still had only four brakes and four tires on the road. I slid right across a four-lane road." Four-wheel drive robs the driver of feedback. "The car driver whose wheels spin once or twice while backing out of the driveway knows that the road is slippery," Bradsher writes. "The SUV driver who navigates the driveway and street without difficulty until she tries to brake may not find out that the road is slippery until it is too late." Jettas are safe because they make their drivers feel unsafe. S.U.V.s are unsafe because they make their drivers feel safe. That feeling of safety isn't the solution; it's the problem.

Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of S.U.V. culture is its attitude toward risk. "Safety, for most automotive consumers, has to do with the notion that they aren't in complete control," Popiel says. "There are unexpected events that at any moment in time can come out and impact them—an oil patch up ahead, an eighteen-wheeler turning over, something falling down. People feel that the elements of the world out of their control are the ones that are going to cause them distress."

Of course, those things really aren't outside a driver's control: an alert driver, in the right kind of vehicle, can navigate the oil patch, avoid the truck, and swerve around the thing that's falling down. Traffic-fatality rates vary strongly with driver behavior. Drunks are 7.6 times more likely to die in accidents than nondrinkers. People who wear their seat belts are almost half as likely to die as those who don't buckle up. Forty-year-olds are ten times less likely to get into accidents than sixteen-year-olds. Drivers of minivans, Wenzel and Ross's statistics tell us, die at a fraction of the rate of drivers of pickup trucks. That's clearly because minivans are family cars, and parents with children in the back seat are less likely to get into accidents. Frank McKenna, a safety expert at the University of Reading, in England, has done experiments where he shows drivers a series of videotaped scenarios—a child running out the front door of his house and onto the street, for example, or a car approaching an intersection at too great a speed to stop at the red light—and asks people to press a button the minute they become aware of the potential for an accident. Experienced drivers press the button between half a second and a second faster than new drivers, which, given that car accidents are events measured in milliseconds, is a significant difference. McKenna's work shows that, with experience, we all learn how to exert some degree of control over what might otherwise appear to be uncontrollable events. Any conception of safety that revolves entirely around the vehicle, then, is incomplete. Is the Boxster safer than the TrailBlazer? It depends on who's behind the wheel. In the hands of, say, my very respectable and prudent middle-aged mother, the Boxster is by far the safer car. In my hands, it probably isn't. On the open road, my reaction to the Porsche's extraordinary road manners and the sweet, irresistible wail of its engine would be to drive much faster than I should. (At the end of my day at Consumers Union, I parked the Boxster, and immediately got into my own car to drive home. In my mind, I was still at the wheel of the Boxster. Within twenty minutes, I had a two-hundred-and-seventy-one-dollar speeding ticket.) The trouble with the S.U.V. ascendancy is that it excludes the really critical component of safety: the driver.



"And this is a crossword puzzle I'm working on."

In psychology, there is a concept called learned helplessness, which arose from a series of animal experiments in the nineteen-sixties at the University of Pennsylvania. Dogs were restrained by a harness, so that they couldn't move, and then repeatedly subjected to a series of electrical shocks. Then the same dogs were shocked again, only this time they could easily escape by jumping over a low hurdle. But most of them didn't; they just huddled in the corner, no longer believing that there was anything they could do to influence their own fate. Learned helplessness is now thought to play a role in such phenomena as depression and the failure of battered women to leave their husbands, but one could easily apply it more widely. We live in an age, after all, that is strangely fixated on the idea of helplessness: we're fascinated by hurricanes and terrorist acts and epidemics like SARS—situations in which we feel powerless to affect our own destiny. In fact, the risks posed to life and limb by forces outside our control are dwarfed by the factors we can control. Our fixation with helplessness distorts our perceptions of risk. "When you feel safe, you can be passive," Rapaille says of the fundamental appeal of the S.U.V. "Safe means I can sleep. I can give up control. I can relax. I can take off my shoes. I can listen to music." For years, we've all made fun of the middle-aged man who suddenly trades in his sedate family sedan for a shiny red sports car. That's called a midlife crisis. But at least it involves some degree of engagement with the act of driving. The man who gives up his sedate family sedan for an S.U.V. is saying something far more troubling—that he finds the demands of the road to be overwhelming. Is acting out really worse than giving up?

On August 9, 2000, the Bridgestone Firestone tire company announced one of the largest product recalls in American history. Because of mounting concerns about safety, the company said, it was replacing some fourteen million tires that had been used primarily on the Ford Explorer S.U.V. The cost of the recall—and of a follow-up replacement program initiated by Ford a year later—ran into billions of dollars. Millions more were spent by both companies on fighting and settling lawsuits from Explorer owners, who alleged that their tires had come apart and caused their S.U.V.s to roll over. In the fall of that year, senior executives from both companies were called to Capitol Hill, where they were publicly berated. It was the biggest scandal to hit the automobile industry in years. It was also one of the strangest. According to federal records, the number of fatalities resulting from the failure of a Firestone tire on a Ford Explorer S.U.V., as of September, 2001, was two hundred and seventy-one. That sounds like a lot, until you remember that the total number of tires supplied by Firestone to the Explorer from the moment the S.U.V. was introduced by Ford, in 1990, was fourteen million, and that the average life span of a tire is forty-five thousand miles. The allegation against Firestone amounts to the claim that its tires failed, with fatal results, two hundred and seventy-one times in the course of six hundred and thirty billion vehicle miles. Manufacturers usually win prizes for failure rates that low. It's also worth remembering that during that same ten-year span almost half a million Americans died in traffic accidents. In other words, during the nineteen-nineties hundreds of thousands of people were killed on the roads because they drove too fast or ran red lights or drank too much. And, of those, a fair proportion involved people in S.U.V.s who were lulled by their four-wheel drive into driving recklessly on slick roads, who drove aggressively because they felt invulnerable, who disproportionately killed those they hit because they chose to drive trucks with inflexible steel-frame architecture, and who crashed because they couldn't bring their five-thousand-pound vehicles to a halt in time. Yet, out of all those fatalities, regulators, the legal profession, Congress, and the media chose to highlight the .0005 per cent that could be linked to an alleged defect in the vehicle.

But should that come as a surprise? In the age of the S.U.V., this is what people worry about when they worry about safety—not risks, however commonplace, involving their own behavior but risks, however rare, involving some unexpected event. The Explorer was big and imposing. It was high above the ground. You could look down on other drivers. You could see if someone was lurking behind or beneath it. You could drive it up on someone's lawn with impunity. Didn't it seem like the safest vehicle in the world? ♦

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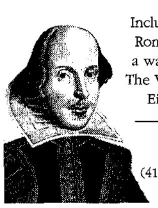

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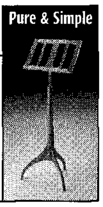

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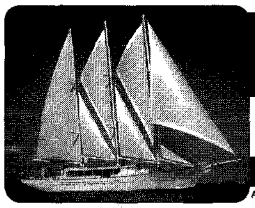

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MEDICAL DISPATCH

THE MOP-UP

Eradicating polio from the planet, one child at a time.

BY ATUL GAWANDE

The index case was an eleven-month-old boy with thick black hair his mother liked to comb forward so that the bangs rimmed his round face. His family lives in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, in a village called Upparahalla, along the Tungabhadra River. Dry mountains of teetering rocks can be seen in three directions from the village. It has no running water and little electricity. The boy's mother is illiterate; the father can read only road signs. They are farm laborers, and they live with their three children in a single-room hut of thatch and mud. But the children are well nourished. The mother wears gold and silver earrings. Once in a while, they travel.

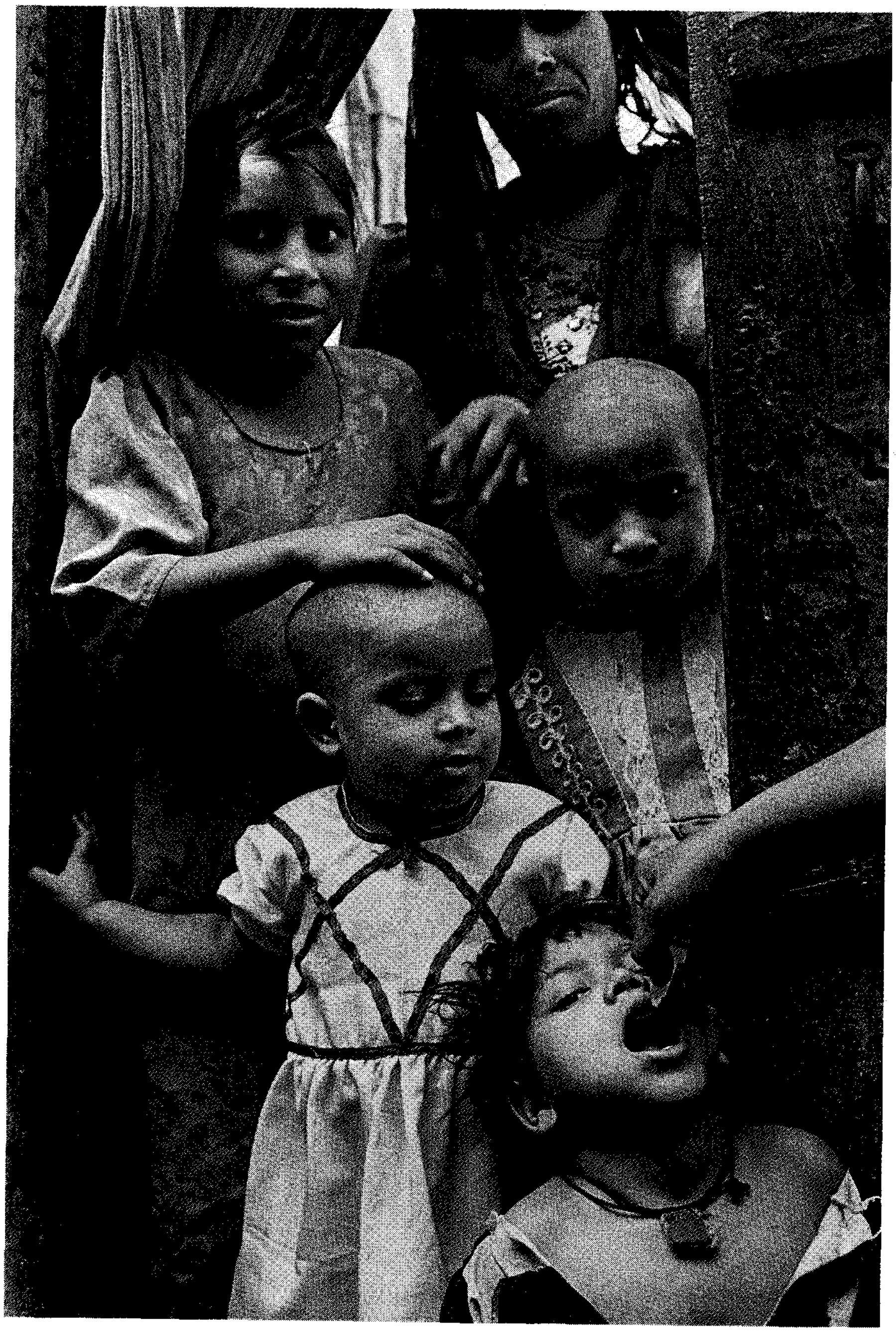
In April last year, the family took a trip north to see relatives. Shortly after they returned, on May 1st, the boy developed high fevers and racking bouts of nausea and vomiting. His parents took him to a nearby clinic, where a doctor gave him an antibiotic injection. Two days later, the fevers subsided, but he became unable to move either of his legs. In a panic, the parents took him back to the doctor, who sent him to the district hospital in Bellary, about forty miles away. As the day progressed, the weakness spread through the boy's body. His breathing grew shallow and labored. He lay flat and motionless in his hospital cot.

A doctor at the hospital, following standard procedure in cases of sudden childhood paralysis, phoned a surveillance medical officer with the World Health Organization in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka. The medical officer made sure that proper cultures were taken and sent to a national laboratory in Mumbai. On June 24th, the laboratory results came back. A young technical officer with the W.H.O. in New Delhi got the call; it was a confirmed case of polio, a disease thought to have been eliminated from southern India, and it set off an alarm.

The World Health Organization is in the sixteenth year of a campaign to eradicate polio from the world. If the campaign succeeds, it may be mankind's single most ambitious accomplishment. International organizations are fond of grand-sounding pledges to rid the planet of this or that menace. Such pledges make the organizations feel that they are doing something important. But they nearly always fail. The world is too vast and too various to submit to dictates from on high.

A handful of serious attempts have been made to eliminate individual diseases from the world. In 1909, the newly established Rockefeller Foundation launched the first global eradication campaign, an effort to end hookworm disease, using anti-helminthic drugs, in fifty-two countries. It didn't work. Today, a billion people—a sixth of the world's population—are infected with hookworm, an intestinal parasite that feeds on human blood. A seventeen-year campaign against yellow fever, led by the Rockefeller Foundation and the United States armed services, had to be abandoned in 1932 when yellow fever was found to have a reservoir outside human beings. (The yellow-fever virus persists in mosquitoes' eggs.) In 1955, the W.H.O. and UNICEF began a campaign to end yaws, an infectious disease causing painful, purulent skin ulcers; workers screened a hundred and sixty million people in sixty-one countries for the disease, and treated every case they found with penicillin. A dozen years later, the campaign was dropped when it turned out that silent, subclinical infections were continuing to propagate the disease. Billions of dollars were spent in the fifties and sixties to eradicate malaria; today the disease afflicts more than three hundred million people a year.

In the course of a century, the only successful attempt at disease eradication has been the battle against smallpox—a mammoth undertaking that was, however, decidedly simpler than the campaign against polio. Smallpox, with its distinctive blisters and vesicles, could be easily



It may cost $200 million to stop the very last case. Photograph by Sebastião Salgado.

AMAZONAS/CONTACT

and quickly identified; the moment a case appeared, a team could be dispatched to immunize everyone the victim might have come into contact with. That strategy, known as "ring immunization," eradicated the disease by 1979. Polio infections are far harder to identify. For every person who is paralyzed, between two hundred and a thousand infected people come down with little more than a stomach flu—and they remain silently contagious for several weeks after the symptoms abate. Nor is every case of childhood paralysis polio; and it usually takes a couple of weeks for stool specimens to be obtained, delivered to a laboratory, and properly tested. By the time one case has been identified, scores more people have been infected. As a result, the area targeted for polio immunization must be far larger than that for smallpox. And, whereas people needed to be vaccinated against smallpox only once for immediate protection, a single dose of polio vaccine does not always take—children with diarrheal illnesses tend to pass the vaccine straight through—and so a repeat round of immunization is required within four to six weeks. In logistical terms, it's the difference between extinguishing a candle flame and putting out a forest fire.

Despite all these obstacles, the campaign against polio has made immense progress. In 1988, more than three hundred and fifty thousand people developed paralytic polio, and at least seventy million were infected with the virus. In 2002, only 1,919 cases were identified. The whole of the Americas, Europe, and the western Pacific, along with nearly all of Africa and Asia, are currently free of the disease.

India is the one country where polio infections have substantially increased in recent years, from a low of two hundred and sixty-eight in 2001 to sixteen hundred in 2002, when it accounted for four-fifths of the world's remaining cases. With its vast population, areas of severe poverty, and varied cultures and geography, it is the place where the campaign against polio is at greatest risk of failure. The outbreak in 2002 was a serious setback, but it was at least confined to a handful of northern states. Now a boy in south India had the disease—Karnataka's first case in almost three years—and if it wasn't checked there it would blaze across the country all over again.

On June 25th, less than twenty-four hours after the report of the Karnataka polio case came in, Sunil Bahl, a W.H.O. physician and technical officer in the Delhi office, sent an e-mail to key people at the W.H.O., at UNICEF, and in the Indian government. It was his job to provide the initial assessment of the facts on the ground. "The case is in an area that has a history of being the worst in Karnataka," he wrote; it had the most polio cases in the early years of the campaign, and poor routines of immunization. "Risk of establishment of virus in the area high, unless quick wide and strong measures in the form of a wide mop-up are taken." A "mop-up" is W.H.O. lingo for a targeted campaign to immunize all susceptible children surrounding a new case. It's what is done in an area that has been rendered polio-free but is facing a new infection that threatens to bring the disease back. The campaigns are highly targeted, and are carried out rapidly, in just three days, to insure that children are not missed and to make it easier to recruit volunteers.

Sunil Bahl sent around a map of the proposed area for the mop-up operation, an area covering fifty thousand square miles. Working around the summer holidays and festivals, government officials selected July 27th for the start of the first immunization round. The second round would follow a month later. Brian Wheeler, a thirty-five-year-old Texan who is the chief operations officer for the W.H.O.'s polio program in India, explained the logistics to me. The Indian government would have to recruit and organize teams of medical workers and volunteers, he said. They would have to be trained in how to administer the vaccine, and provided with transportation, vaccine, and insulated coolers and ice packs to keep the vaccine cold. And they would have to fan out and vaccinate every child under five years of age. Anything less than ninety-per-cent coverage of the target population would be considered a failure.

I asked him how many people that would involve.

He checked his budget sheet. The plan, he said, was to employ thirty-seven thousand vaccinators and four thousand health-care supervisors, rent two thousand vehicles, supply more than eighteen thousand insulated vaccine carriers, and have the workers go door to door to vaccinate 4.2 million children. In three days.

Polio is caused by an intestinal virus; the virus must be ingested to bring about an infection. Once inside the gut, it passes through the lining and takes up residence in nearby lymph nodes. There it multiplies, produces fevers and stomach upset, and passes back into the feces. Those infected can contaminate their clothing, bathing sites, even supplies of drinking water, and thereby spread the disease. (The virus can survive as long as sixty days outside the body.)

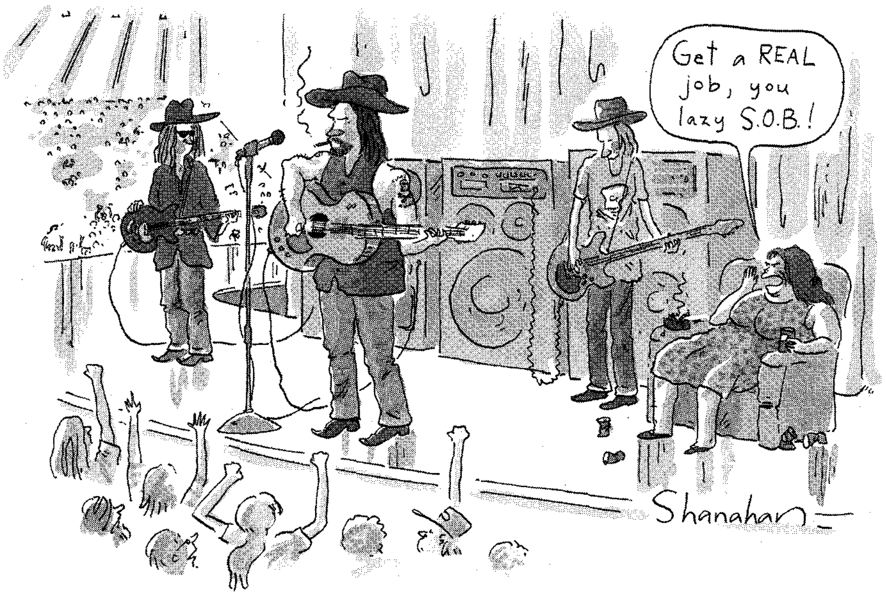
Poliovirus infects only a few kinds of nerve cells, but what it infects it destroys. In the most dreaded cases, the virus spreads from the bloodstream into the neurons of the brain stem, the cells that allow you to breathe and swallow. To stay alive, a person has to be fed through a tube and ventilated by machine. The nerve cells most commonly attacked, though, are the anterior horn cells of the spinal cord, which control the arms, the legs, and the abdominal muscles. Often, so many neurons are destroyed that muscle function is eliminated altogether. Tendon reflexes disappear. Limbs hang limp and useless.

The first effective vaccine for polio was introduced in 1955, after the largest clinical trial in history. (Jonas Salk's vaccine, made from killed poliovirus, was given to four hundred and forty thousand children; two hundred and ten thousand received a placebo injection, and more than a million served as unvaccinated controls.) Five years later, Albert Sabin published the results of an alternative polio vaccine he had used in an immunization campaign in Toluca, Mexico, a city of a hundred thousand people, where a polio outbreak was in progress. His was an oral vaccine, easier to administer than Salk's injected one. It was also a live vaccine, containing weakened but intact poliovirus, and so it could produce not only immunity but also a mild contagious infection that would spread the immunity to others. In just four days, Sabin's team managed to vaccinate more than eighty per cent of the children under the age of eleven—twenty-six thousand children in all. It was a blitzkrieg assault. Within weeks, polio had disappeared from the city.

This approach, Sabin argued, could be used to eliminate polio from entire countries, even the world. Curiously, the only person in the West who took him up on the idea was Fidel Castro. In 1962, Castro's Committee for the Defense of the Revolution organized 82,366 local committees to carry out a succession of week-long, house-to-house national immunization campaigns using the Sabin vaccine. In 1963, only one case of polio occurred in Cuba.

Despite those results, Sabin's grand idea did not catch on until 1985, when the Pan American Health Organization launched an initiative to eradicate polio from the Americas. (Six years later, Luis Fermin Tenorio, a two-year-old boy in the town of Pichinaki, Peru, became the last polio victim in the Americas.) In 1988, spurred by the campaign's growing success, the W.H.O. committed itself to eradicating polio from the world. That year, Rotary International pledged a quarter of a billion dollars for the effort (it has since provided three hundred and fifty million dollars more). UNICEF agreed to organize the worldwide production and distribution of vaccine. And the United States made the campaign one of the C.D.C.'s core initiatives, supplying both expertise and considerable additional funding.

The centerpiece of the effort has been what are called national immunization days—three-day periods when all children under five in a country are immunized, regardless of whether they have received immunization before. In one week in 1997, two hundred and fifty million children were vaccinated simultaneously in China, India, Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, and Burma. In each of the past three years, national immunization days have reached more than half a billion children—almost a tenth of the world's population. Through such efforts—and a reliable network of monitors to detect outbreaks—the W.H.O. campaign has brought the


Get a REAL job, you lazy S.O.B.!
Shanahan

IN-LAW COUNTRY

incidence of polio in the world to less than one per cent of what it used to be.

The striking thing is that the W.H.O. doesn't really have the authority to do any of this. It can't tell governments what to do. It hires no vaccinators, distributes no vaccine. It is a small Geneva bureaucracy run by several hundred international delegates whose annual votes tell the organization what to do but not how to do it. In India, a nation of a billion people, the W.H.O. employs two hundred and fifty physicians around the country to work full time on polio surveillance. The only substantial resource that the W.H.O. has cultivated is information and expertise. I didn't understand how this could suffice. Then I went to Karnataka.

For the three days of the mop-up, I travelled through Karnataka with Pankaj Bhatnagar, a W.H.O. pediatrician, whose job was to see that the operation was properly executed. He is in his forties, with a slight paunch and an easy, genial manner. This can be a tricky business, he explained as we waited in Delhi for our flight to Karnataka. The W.H.O. provides much of the money for mop-up operations. UNICEF provides the vaccines. Rotary of India prints the banners and advocates locally for the cause. But the operation itself is run by government health officials: they are the ones who must hire the thousands of vaccinators, train them properly, and send them from house to house.

We took a plane to Bangalore, then travelled eight hours overnight by train to Bellary, a crowded, dusty town that is the district seat for Upparahalla. At a small, strange hotel there (it had a safari theme), Pankaj convened the members of his team over breakfast. To monitor the immunization of four million children, he had just four people: three young medical officers and himself. They were the only ones available who spoke Kanada, the local language. The medical officers finished their breakfast of *idli* and *dosa,* and lit up cigarettes (in India, it seems, half the doctors who work in public health smoke), and then Pankaj asked for a status report.

Since the index case was identified, he was told, four more cases of confirmed polio had appeared in the region, and four "hot" cases were awaiting confirmatory testing. Of the thirteen districts targeted for mop-ups, Bellary accounted for all but one of the cases.

"Then we must concentrate our monitoring in this district," Pankaj said. "This is now the place with the most intense transmission of polio in the world." Another doctor pulled out some figures on the area. Bellary district, he told Pankaj, has a population of 2,965,459, with five hundred and forty-two villages and nine urban towns. Fifty-two per cent of the males and seventy-four per cent of the females are illiterate. There are just ninety-nine doctors in the public-health system. He turned to a map. The polio cases, he said, were clustered in a triangle of villages around Siriguppa, a small, slum-ridden town about forty miles away.

Pankaj made his assignments. For the mop-up, he would cover at least Upparahalla; a village called Sirigere, where polio had appeared; the two urban areas with hot cases; and a mine in Chitradurga, where vaccinators might have particular difficulties gaining entry, because the housing was on the property of a private company. He divided the others among the remaining villages and asked them to follow up behind him for a second check in Upparahalla and the urban areas. The group then split up. By eight-thirty in the morning, Pankaj and I were on the road.

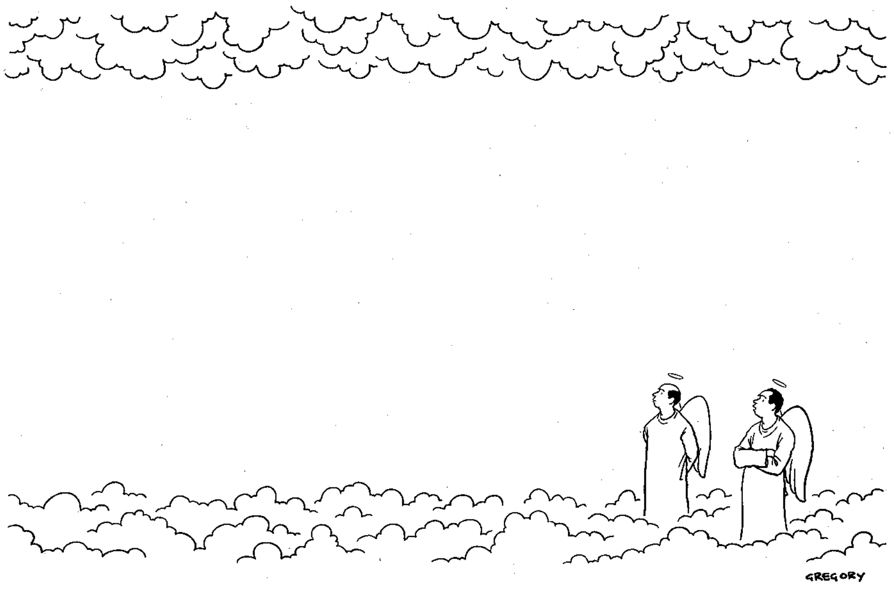
We had a rented four-wheel-drive Toyota and a betel-nut-chewing driver who waited until we were an hour down a pitted road to tell us that the battery was dead. Whenever the engine was turned off, he said, we'd need to push-start the car. Pankaj thought this was funny.

The terrain outside the windows was baked by the hot sun, and the hills were desert-lizard brown. The monsoon had failed to come this year. Only the few fields that had drip irrigation looked green. It took us about two hours to travel the thirty-five miles to Sirigere, a village of mud-walled huts jammed up against one another. There was garbage in the alleyways, and dusty-faced children were playing everywhere. Pankaj had the driver stop at a group of dwellings seemingly at random. Marked in chalk on each door was a number, a "P," and that day's date. The number was the house number. The "P" meant that the vaccinators had come, identified all the children under the age of five who lived in the house, and vaccinated them—that very day, according to the date marked. Pankaj took out a pad of paper and strode over to one of the huts. He asked the young woman at the door how many children lived there. One, she said. He asked to see the child. When she found him, Pankaj took his hand and noted the black ink mark on the nail bed of his little finger—it's how the vaccinators tag the children who have received polio drops. Was any other child in the fields? Away at a relative's? No, she said. He asked if her boy had received routine immunizations before today. No, she said. Had she heard about the polio case in town? She had. Had she heard about the vaccination team before the workers arrived at the door? She had not. He thanked her and wrote all the information down on a form before moving on.

So far, the workers had done their job, Pankaj said, several houses later. But he was disturbed that no one knew the vaccinators were coming that day. In addition to banners (we'd seen a couple hanging as we came into the village), they were supposed to use "miking" to reach the illiterate—auto-rickshaws with loudspeakers playing tapes announcing the upcoming campaign. Without that warning, some people would turn the vaccinators away.

Going around to a few more huts, we bumped into a vaccination team—a social-welfare worker wearing sandals, a blue sari, and a flower in her hair, and a younger, college-student volunteer with a flower in her hair, too, and a square blue cold box of vaccine slung over her shoulder. They were standing in front of a hut they'd marked with an "X" instead of a "P"—the woman of the house had said that three children lived there, but one was absent and could not be vaccinated. Pankaj asked the vaccinators to open their cold box. He checked the freezer packs inside—still frozen, despite the heat. He inspected the individual vaccine vials—still fresh. There was a gray-and-white target sign on each vial. Did they know what it meant? That the vaccine was still good, they said. What does it look like when the vaccine expires? The white inside the target turns gray or black, they said. Right answer. Pankaj moved on.

We went to the home of the village's recent polio case. The girl was eighteen months old and silent. The mother, pregnant and with a three-year-old boy clinging to her side, laid her down on her



"That's where the celebrities are."

back so that we could examine her. Neither leg would move. Lifting each one, I felt no resistance in the child's hips, her knees, her ankles. Only four weeks had passed since she was stricken. She almost certainly was still contagious.

Pankaj found three children visiting the house. He checked each of their hands. None had received polio drops yet.

We gave the four-wheel-drive a push and made our way to Sirigere's primary health center, a few miles outside the village. It was a drab, unpainted, three-room concrete building. The center's medical officer met us at the door. About forty years old, with ironed slacks, a buttoned short-sleeve shirt, and the only college education in the area, he seemed eager to have our company. He offered tea and tried to make some small talk. But Pankaj was all business. "May I see your microplan?" he asked before we had even sat down. He was referring to the block-by-block plan drawn up by each local officer. It is the key to how the operation is organized.

The medical officer's microplan was a sheaf of ragged paper, with marker-drawn maps and pencilled-in tables. The first page said that he had recruited twenty-two teams of two vaccinators each to cover a population of 34,144 people. "How do you know this population estimate is right?" Pankaj asked. The officer replied that he'd done a house-to-house survey. Pankaj looked at the map—the villages in the area were spread out over more than ten miles. "How do you distribute the vaccine to the vaccinators who are far away?" By vehicle, the officer said. "How many vehicles do you have?" Two, he said. "What are the vehicles?" One was an ambulance. The other was a rented car. "And how does the supervisor get out to the field?" There was a pause. The officer shuffled through the microplan. More silence. He did not know.

Pankaj went on. Twenty-two teams would require about a hundred ice packs per day. "Why did you budget for only a hundred and fifty ice packs?" We are freezing them overnight for the next day, the officer explained. "Where?" He showed Pankaj his deep freezer. Pankaj opened it up and pulled out the thermometer, which revealed that the temperature was above freezing. The electricity goes out, the officer explained. "What is your plan for that?" He had a generator. But when pressed to show it he was forced to admit that it wasn't really working, either.

Pankaj is not a physically imposing man. He has a boyish mop of thick black hair, parted almost down the center, and sometimes it sticks up. He has programmed his cell phone to play the James Bond theme when it rings. When we're driving, he points out the monkeys we pass. He makes jokes. He laughs with his head tilted back. But in the field his demeanor is grave and taciturn. He doesn't tell people if their answers are good or bad. He keeps everyone on edge. I had an impulse to tell the medical officer that he was doing fine. But Pankaj seemed to make a point of saying nothing to fill the silences.

Later, in Siriguppa, where two of the hot cases had appeared, we walked the neighborhoods with another medical officer. Siriguppa is a dense, urbanized town of windowless concrete-block tenements, rusting corrugated-metal lean-tos, and some forty-three thousand people. We had to fight our way through narrow streets crowded with water buffalo, motorcycles, braying goats, and fruit sellers. There was electricity here, I noticed, running through wires that drooped from tilting utility poles, which were scattered around like crooked teeth, and the sound of televisions poured out from some of the houses we visited.

The two hot cases, we found, were in a small Muslim enclave that had sprouted up a few months earlier. Going door to door, Pankaj learned that almost none of the enclave's children had received routine immunizations. Some of the families seemed suspicious of us, answering questions tersely or trying to avoid us altogether. We found one boy whom the vaccinators had missed. The previous year, rumors had circulated widely among Muslims that the Indian government was giving different drops to their male children in order to make them infertile. The rumors were thought to have been quashed by an education campaign and greater Muslim involvement in the immunization program. But one had to wonder.

Walking with a local doctor and a vaccination team through a village called Balkundi, we came to the home of a small, pretty woman, who had rings on her toes and a baby held loosely on her hip. Another child, a boy of about three, stood nearby, staring at our little crowd. Neither child had been vaccinated, so Pankaj asked if we could give them the polio drops. No, she said. She did not appear angry or afraid. Pankaj asked if she knew that a case of polio had appeared in her neighborhood. Yes, she said. But she still didn't want the drops given. Why? She would not say. Pankaj said O.K., thanked her for her time, and moved on to the next house.

"That's it?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

The local doctor had stayed behind, however, and when we looked back he was shouting at the mother: "Are you stupid? Your children will become paralyzed. They will die."

It was the one time I saw Pankaj angry. He walked back and confronted the doctor. "Why are you shouting?" Pankaj demanded. "Before, she was listening, at least. But now? She's not going to listen anymore."

"She is illiterate!" the doctor shot back, embarrassed to be rebuked so openly. "She doesn't know what is right for her child!"

"What does that matter?" Pankaj replied. "Your shouting doesn't help anything. And neither does a story going around that we are forcing drops on people."

So far, few were refusing the drops, and that was good enough, he told me later. A single nasty rumor could destroy the whole operation.

One difficult question came up repeatedly—from local doctors, from villagers, from workers trudging house to house. The question was: Why? Why this huge polio campaign when what we need is—fill in the blank here—clean water (diarrheal illness kills five hundred thousand Indian children per year), better nutrition (half of children under three have stunted growth), working septic systems (which would help prevent polio as well as other diseases), irrigation (so a single rainless season would not impoverish farming families)? We saw neighborhoods that had had outbreaks of malaria, tuberculosis, cholera. But no one important had come to visit in years. Now one case of polio occurs and the infantry marches in?

There are some stock answers. We can do it all, goes one. We can eradicate polio and do better on the other fronts. In reality, though, choices are made. For that whole week, for instance, doctors in northern Karnataka had all but shut down their primary health clinics in order to carry out the polio-vaccination work.

Pankaj relies on a somewhat more persuasive line of argument: that ending polio is, in fact, worth diverting resources for. In one village, I watched a resident demand to know why the government and the W.H.O. weren't combating malnutrition there instead. There was only so much they could do, Pankaj said. "And, if you're starving, becoming paralyzed certainly isn't going to help."

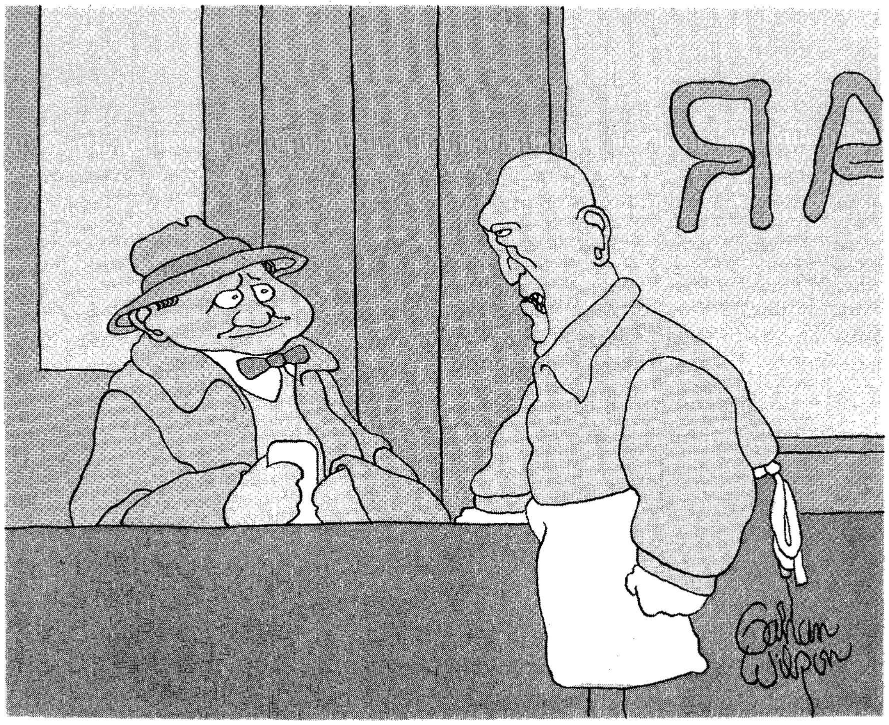
Still, you could make the same claim for almost any human problem that you decide to tackle—blindness or cancer or, for that matter, kidney stones. ("If you're starving, kidney pain certainly isn't going to help.") So far in the sixteen-year polio campaign, an estimated five million cases of paralytic polio have been averted, and that is an extraordinary achievement. But the campaign has already cost three billion dollars, more than six hundred dollars a case. To put that in perspective, the Indian government's total budget for health care came to four dollars per person last year.

Even if the campaign succeeds in the eradication of polio, it is entirely possible that more lives would be saved in the future if the money were spent on, say, building proper sewage systems or improving basic health services. What's more, success is by no means assured. The W.H.O. has had to extend its target date for eradication from 2000 to 2002, and then to 2005. In these final years of the campaign, more and more money is spent chasing the few hundred cases that keep popping up. A certain weariness settles in. Around twenty-four million children are born in India each year, creating a new pool of potential polio victims the size of Venezuela's entire population. Just to stay caught up, a mammoth campaign to immunize every child under the age of five has been planned for this month. Stopping the very last case of polio, one official told me, might cost as much as two hundred million dollars. The truth is, no cost-benefit calculus will tell us whether all that money is well spent.

There is, nonetheless, a kind of greatness in the elimination of a terrible disease. We as a civilization have few things we can accomplish of genuinely lasting significance for mankind: we have built no pyramids, no Great Walls to stand for thousands of years. It is, instead, through medicine that we may create our enduring monument. The eradication of smallpox and now, perhaps, polio will stand as our pyramids.

But this means we must actually get down to that final polio case. Otherwise, the efforts of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers, the billions spent will have amounted to nothing, and perhaps worse than nothing. To fail at this venture would put into question the very ideal of eradication.

Beneath the ideal is the gruellingly unglamorous and uncertain work. But there is a system, and it has eradicated polio in countries with far worse conditions than I was seeing in India—for example, in Bangladesh, in Vietnam, in



"I don't like hearing happy stories."

Rwanda, in Zimbabwe. Polio was eradicated from Angola in the midst of a civil war. An outbreak in Kandahar in 2002 was halted by a W.H.O.-led mop-up operation despite the Afghan war. New mop-ups are now under way in northern Nigeria, where an outbreak recently appeared and spread into neighboring countries. In India, Pankaj told me, there have been campaigns on camels in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, in jeeps among the tribal communities of the Jharkhand forests, on power boats through flooded regions of Assam and Meghalaya, on Navy cruisers travelling to remote islands in the Bay of Bengal. We covered about a thousand miles in our Toyota in the three days of going town to town. Outside the village of Balkundi, we came upon several makeshift shanties for migrant laborers, about four miles apart and not on any maps. When we checked the children, though, they all had the vaccinators' ink marks on their pinkies. At Chitradurga, we found the mines in decay, but state officials had made sure that the company gave the vaccinators access to the workers' compound. With some searching, we discovered a few children here and there. Every one of them had received the vaccine, too.

By the end of the mop-up, UNICEF officials had bought more than five million doses of fresh vaccine and distributed them through the thirteen districts. They had blanketed television, radio, and local newspapers with public-service announcements. Rotary of India had printed and delivered twenty-five thousand banners, sixty thousand posters, and more than six hundred and fifty thousand handbills. And four million of the targeted 4.2 million children had been vaccinated.

India has had just thirty-six cases of polio in the past three months because of such efforts. There have been almost no cases during that time in northern India, a region that had more than a thousand cases in 2002. Pankaj and his colleagues believe that they're finally close to their goal of eradication. And as India goes, so, we can expect, will the world.

Pankaj says that he has seen more than a thousand cases of polio in his career as a pediatrician. When we drove through the villages and towns, he could pick out polio victims at a glance. They were everywhere, I began to realize: the beggar with two emaciated legs folded under him, rolling by on a wooden cart; the man dragging his leg like a club down the street; the passerby with a contracted arm tucked against his side.

On the second day of the mop-up, we visited Upparahalla, the village where the Karnataka outbreak had started. The first, index case of polio was now a fourteen-month-old boy with a healthy, almost muscular thickness about his upper body; after the first few days of his infection, his breathing had returned to normal. But when his mother put him down on his stomach you could see that his legs were withered. With the exercises the nurses had taught her to do with him, he had regained enough movement in his left leg to be able to crawl, but his right leg dragged limply behind him.

Making our way around the open sewage, the mud-covered pigs, the cows resting curled up like cats with their heads on their hooves, we found the neighbor girl who had come down with polio after the boy. She was eighteen months old, with a big worried face, perfect white teeth, and short spiky hair. She was wearing small gold earrings and a yellow-and-brown checked dress. She squirmed in her mother's arms, but her legs only dangled beneath her dress. Her mother wore an impassive expression as she stood before us in the sun, holding her paralyzed child. Pankaj gently asked her if the girl had had polio drops before—perhaps she'd received the vaccine but it had not taken. The mother said that a health worker had come around with polio drops a few weeks before her daughter became sick. But she had heard from other villagers that children were getting fevers from the drops. So she refused the vaccination. A look of profound sadness now swept over her. She had not understood, she said, staring down at the ground.

Eventually, Pankaj continued onward, checking on the vaccinators going door to door. Then, when he was finished, we left. The road heading out of the village was a red dirt track and we rattled over it with our wheels in the ruts that the bullock carts had made.

"What will you do when polio is finally gone?" I asked Pankaj.

"Well, there is always measles," he said. ♦

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THE S.U.V. CULTURE

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AND: A calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country

SHOUTS & MURMURS

8 SIMPLE RULES FOR DATING MY EX-WIFE

BY DAVID OWEN

I share the blame for my divorce. I did a lot of things wrong in my marriage: worked too hard, cared too much, made too many sacrifices for my family. Tore my heart out and left it lying on the kitchen floor so that anybody who wasn't too busy stabbing me in the back could stomp it into the no-wax vinyl tiles that I myself laid down at a savings of more than two thousand dollars. I am guilty of that and more.

But forget it. Past is past. Let's move on. You are now dating my ex-wife, and her lawyer, my lawyer, and a state judge have all informed me in writing that you have a legal right to do so. So be it. I'm not a blackmailing pickpocket doubletalking divorce attorney, so I don't know the technicalities. But the two of us still need to have some kind of ground rules here:

1. Twenty-two years, pal. That's how long we were married. You've been dating her for a month. Tell you what. In twenty-one years and eleven months, let's you and me talk again.

2. Despite what you may have been told, I've got some self-respect left, and I don't need to have your face shoved into my face every time I turn around. From five o'clock on Friday afternoon until two o'clock on Sunday morning, the bar at the Ramada Inn belongs to me.

3. The oil in the Saturn wagon gets changed every three thousand miles—not five thousand miles, not seven thousand miles, not ten thousand miles—and I don't care what she or the owner's manual or the guy in the service department or the Internet says. Three. Thousand. God. Damned. Miles.

4. The Wiffle ball hanging from the string in the right-hand bay of the garage is where the middle of the front of the hood of the Saturn wagon should be pointed when it's parked correctly. The Wiffle ball is not supposed to rest on the hood of the car. You aim at the ball. It makes parking easier.

5. The two of you don't walk together within a thousand feet of the golf course or the driving range. Not ever.

6. Before you even ask, allow me to explain why there's no cable TV. To install cable TV, they have to drill a hole through the house. Hey, fine, so let's get satellite TV instead. Well, guess what? To install satellite TV, they have to drill about twenty holes through the roof. Somebody ought to get the Nobel Prize for that idea—drilling holes through the roof.

7. The band saw in the basement belongs to me. You are not to use it, you are not to move it, you are not to put anything on it or let anyone else put anything on it, including even just one corner of a laundry basket while the person carrying the laundry basket scratches their nose. I can't remove the band saw from the basement just yet. For one thing, I don't have a workshop to put it in anymore, and if you're interested in knowing why I suggest you study the terms of my divorce. For another thing, I assembled that band saw myself. When I got the box home from Sears, I thought, Hey, great, I'll just lift out my brand-new band saw and start ripping pressure-treated railroad ties, but guess what? The box didn't contain a band saw. The box contained a large plastic bag filled with medium-sized plastic bags filled with small plastic bags filled with parts the size of bird shot. Putting that thing together took three solid months of the best years of my life, and to make the blade cut plumb I had to level the legs with a laser transit that I borrowed from a friend of mine who's a contractor. So hands the hell off.

8. This should go without saying, but—no funny business. Understood? She's fifty years old, for crying out loud. ♦

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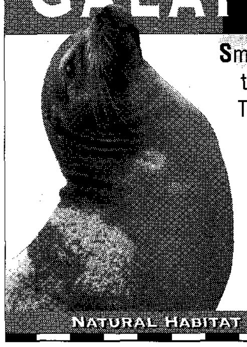

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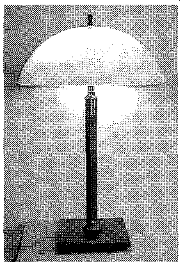

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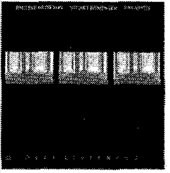

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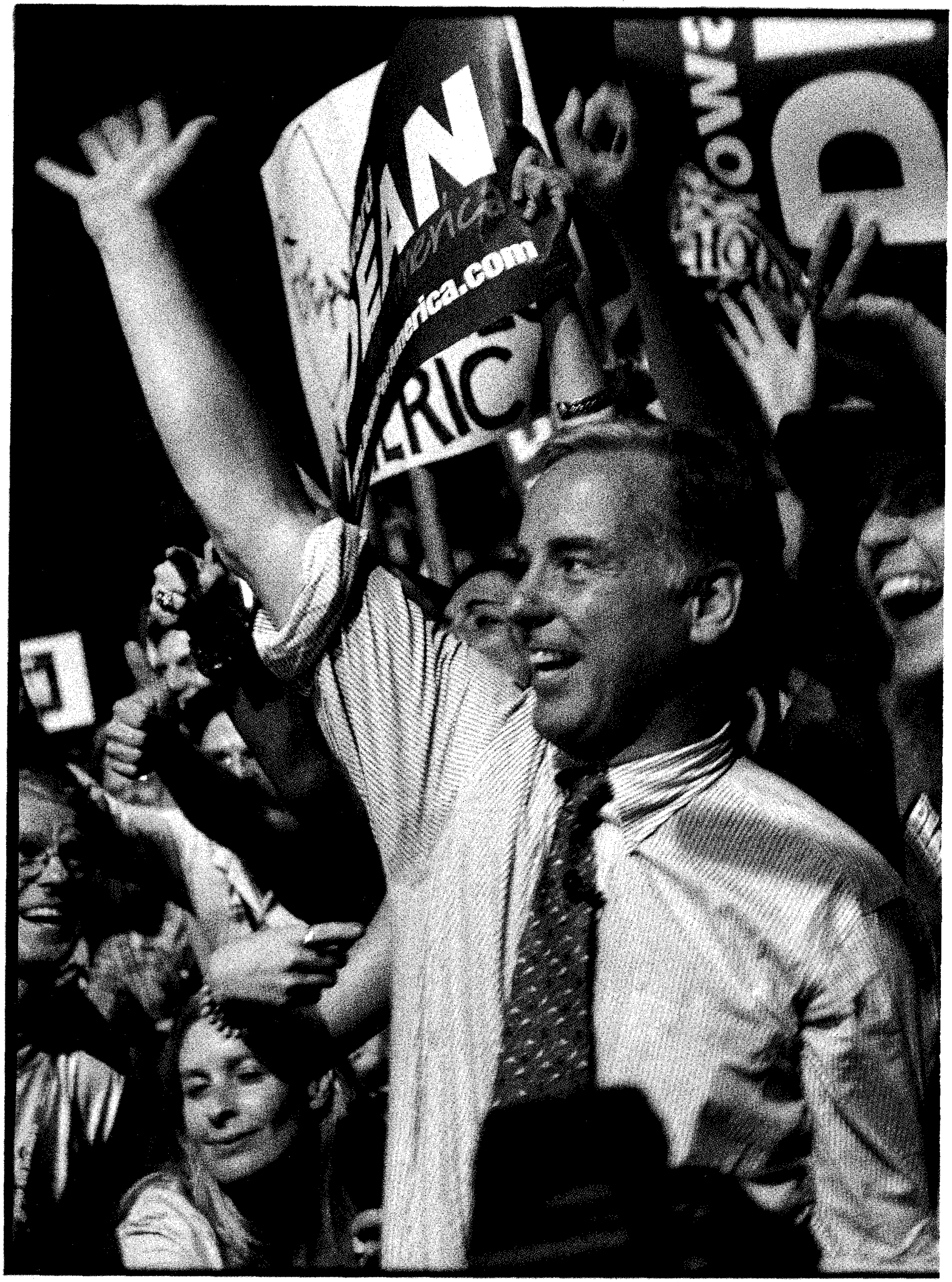
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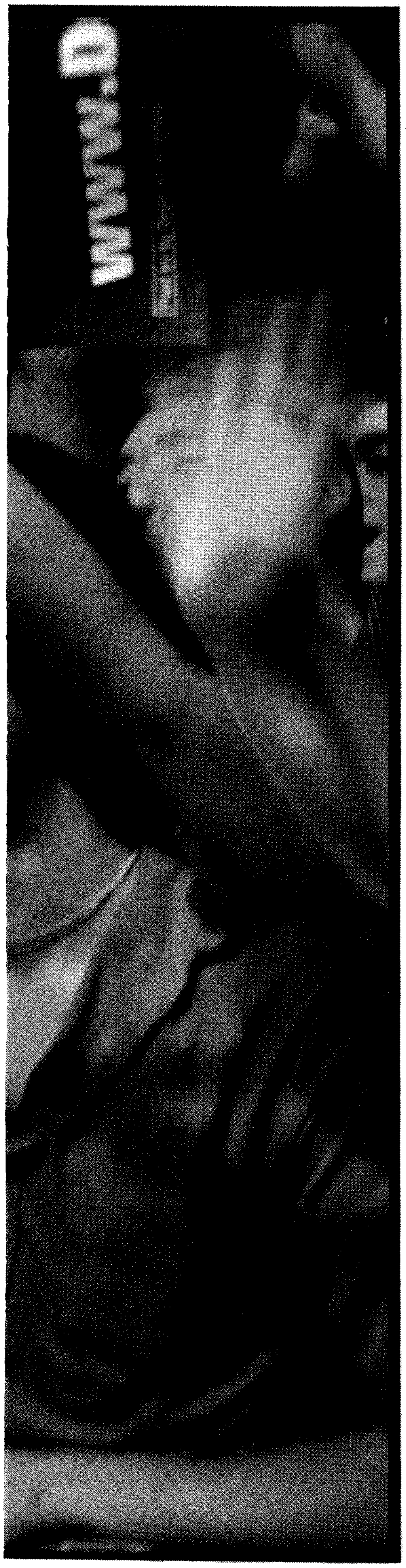
Dean at a rally in New York City. "I didn't know it was going to turn out like this," he said. "Clearly, we had no idea what we were doin



hotograph by Sylvia Plachy.

PROFILES

RUNNING ON INSTINCT

Howard Dean's critics say he is winging it. Can that get him to the White House?

BY MARK SINGER

On a sultry Tuesday night last August, Howard Dean stood on a stage in Bryant Park, in midtown Manhattan, and faced a crowd of ten thousand. He was nearing the end of his twenty-minute stump speech, an enthusiastically received disparagement of George W. Bush's handling of Iraq, the economy and the budget deficit, the battle against terrorism, the North Korean nuclear threat, global trade, health care, energy policy, the environment, and education—with detours to take swipes at Rush Limbaugh and the religious right. Along the way, Dean offered, by contrast, an accounting of his major accomplishments during his eleven years as governor of Vermont.

At last, he arrived at his peroration, the thematic crux of his campaign for the Presidency: "The biggest lie that people like me tell people like you during the election season is 'If you vote for me, I'll solve all your problems.' The truth is that the power to change this country is in *your* hands, not mine. Abraham Lincoln said that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from this earth. But this President, this President has forgotten ordinary Americans. And *you* have the power to take this party back and make it stand for something again. *You* have the power to take this country back."

A lot of Vermonters have a bemused reaction to this sort of oratorical zeal, having received minimal exposure to grandiloquence during Dean's governorship. His annual State of the State addresses, for instance, are remembered as flatly delivered, stick-to-the-text exercises. But Dean's hortative style on the stump—his habit of aiming both index fingers at his listeners and, not unlike an evangelist in the pulpit, bellowing, "*You* have the power! *You* have the power!"—is perfectly suited to the Internet-driven populist energy that has given his campaign such dynamism, and it invariably galvanizes audiences.

Above the roar of the Bryant Park crowd, Dean interjected, "Thank you very much. Thank you very, very much, New York City. I love you. I was born here. Thank you."

I was born here. Ten times in four days I had heard the stump speech, and this was Dean's sole autobiographical public utterance—four words, a parenthetical afterthought. The Bryant Park rally culminated the aptly named Sleepless Summer Tour. About thirty campaign workers and supporters, and a comparable contingent of journalists, had been ferried coast to coast to coast—Washington, D.C., to Wisconsin to the Pacific Northwest to Texas to Illinois to New York—in a chartered jet with legroom sufficient only for the legless. In midsummer, Dean had appeared simultaneously on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*, he was raising money (mostly via the Internet) with vastly more ease and success than his competitors, and his once quixotic pursuit of the Presidency—derided by his own mother, in its embryonic phase, as "preposterous, and besides, it's very expensive"—had become stunningly plausible. The size and fervor of the Sleepless Summer Tour crowds—five thousand at midday on a Sunday in Portland, ten thousand later that afternoon in Seattle, a roof-shaking gathering of three thousand the following night in San Antonio—evinced a dexterity of campaign organization and a visceral passion among voters that made it easy to recognize, five months before the first Presidential-primary ballots would be cast, that the Democratic nomination had become Dean's to lose. None of the other aspirants, it seemed, had the resources, the creative instincts, or the rhetorical ferocity to match him. (He was merciless when it came to skewering President Bush, whom he ridiculed variously as "bullheaded," "petulant," and "reckless.")

Yet, as Dean's momentum accelerated, it became clear that something was missing: as the anomalous "I was born here" implied, fundamental questions about the Dean DNA—who was he and what motivated him?—lacked articulated answers. (You were born, yes, and then what?) His principal rivals—John Kerry, Wesley Clark, John Edwards, Richard Gephardt, Joseph Lieberman—all subscribed to the focus-group-tested orthodoxy that an ample measure of ostensibly intimate disclosure was the sine qua non of effective communication with the electorate. So Kerry alluded incessantly to his exploits in Vietnam; Clark spoke of the pride he felt in his military career; Edwards and Gephardt emoted about having been shaped by their fathers' humble livelihoods (textile-mill worker, milk-truck driver); Lieberman's public identity became inseparable from his devout Judaism. Similar faith in the indispensability of soulful, sentimental narrative had worked for the last two Democratic governors to win the White House—a Bible-quoting Georgia peanut farmer and a Svengali from "a place called Hope"—but Dean was having none of it.

The logical (and cynical) explanation was that the Howard Brush Dean III backstory—son of a conservative Republican Wall Street securities broker, Park Avenue childhood, weekends and holidays in East Hampton, private schools, Yale; superficially, a résumé strikingly similar to George W. Bush's—couldn't be reconciled with a populist-insurgent political persona. But it was also the case that throughout his public life Dean had rigorously guarded the sanctity of his private life.

Dean's abstinence from personal revelation was just one way that he had discombobulated the Party leadership's assumptions about how to reclaim the White House. He stridently rejected the forever-glancing-over-the-shoulder centrist calculations that had defined the Democratic Party establishment since the advent of the Clinton era; he wasn't from the South; he almost never spoke about faith ("I don't go to church very often," he announced in a debate in November); he'd become a free-trade dissenter; he didn't target his speeches directly at aging, affluent suburbanites. Nevertheless, his heretical choices about what to say (and what not to say) had somehow propelled him to the top of the heap. It was a trajectory that even Dean seemed not to have foreseen. "This campaign is not about me—this is a movement" was one of his catchphrases, uttered with a matter-of-factness that sounded as if he actually believed it. Watching the race unfold, one assumed that he also instinctively trusted serendipity. Indeed, the evidence of Dean's career thus far was that, as bold, hardworking, and opportunistic a politician as he obviously was, a key component of his success had been his preternatural good luck.

RETURN BAGGAGE

The cemetery plot for tiny graves.
We, the long-lived, pass by furtively,
like wealthy people passing slums.

Here lie little Zosia, Jacek, Dominik,
prematurely stripped of the sun, the moon,
the clouds, the turning seasons.

They didn't stash much in their return bags.
Some scraps of sights
that scarcely count as plural.
A fistful of air with a butterfly flitting.
A spoonful of bitter knowledge—the taste of medicine.

Small-scale naughtiness,
granted, some of it fatal.
Gaily chasing the ball across the road.
The happiness of skating on thin ice.

This one here, that one down there, those on the end:
before they grew to reach a doorknob,

The morning of the Bryant Park rally, the Dean campaign plane had landed in Chicago, where he was scheduled to address the national convention of the Communications Workers of America and speak at an outdoor rally on the Navy Pier. As I walked across the tarmac toward a bus, I heard someone call my name. It was Kurt Schmoke, the former mayor of Baltimore (1987-99) and now the dean of the law school at Howard University, who had been invited along for a day of politicking with his fellow-member of the Yale class of 1971. (I was class of '72, but never met Dean at Yale.) One of Schmoke's roles in the Dean campaign, he told me, was as a member of a weekly Washington-based domestic-policy roundtable. He was also trying to enlist the support of other African-Americans in state and local government. Coincidentally, not long before our paths crossed in Chicago I'd been thinking about Schmoke, as I'd been ruminating about Dean's evolution as a public citizen. During the spring of 1970, the Yale campus had been roiled by political unrest, and Schmoke had distinguished himself as an adroit and coolheaded player. If, a year later, a poll of the graduating seniors had asked which of their number would most likely run for President someday, Schmoke, then bound for Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship, would have been the consensus choice. Dean, who next to his photograph in the Yale yearbook had identified his future occupation as "living," would have been on no one's list.

When Dean entered Yale, in the fall of 1967, he had spent virtually his entire life (one exceptional interlude being a high-school summer working on a Florida

break a watch,
smash their first windowpane.

Malgorzata, four years old,
two of them spent staring at the ceiling.

Rafalek, missed his first birthday by a month,
and Zuzia missed Christmas,
when misty breath turns to frost.

And what can you say about one day of life,
a minute, a second:
darkness, a light bulb's flash, then dark again?

KOSMOS MAKROS
CHRONOS PARADOKSOS:
Only stony Greek has words for that.

—*Wislawa Szymborska*
(Translated, from the Polish, by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.)

cattle ranch, where his colleagues were mostly Cuban exiles) cosseted in institutions and surroundings of affluence and privilege. After four years at St. George's, a small Episcopal boarding school in Newport, Rhode Island, he had added a postgraduate year at an English boarding school. Among his peers, however, his style and demeanor suggested nothing about his pedigree. "He was easygoing, exceedingly relaxed, not pretentious at all," Alan Yuspeh, now a Nashville attorney, who lived upstairs from Dean their freshman year, said. "He never, to my recollection, discussed his prep-school days. I never heard him speak about his family. He would never have told you that he had this Upper East Side background."

In the mid-sixties, Yale, like other élite universities, had begun to commit itself to progressive admissions policies based upon merit and a quest for ethnic diversity rather than Wasp hegemony. This was a shift that Dean, the son and grandson of Yale alumni, figured he might as well make the most of. Obliging an explicit request from Dean, the housing-placement office assigned him two African-American roommates. One was Ralph Dawson, a sheet-metal worker's son who is today a labor lawyer in New York City.

"Unless you operated from a stereotypic understanding of the Yale white boy as rich, you wouldn't know that about Howard," Dawson, who graduated from an all-black public high school in Charleston, South Carolina, told me. "When it came to race—and I don't know whether this was a function of intent or just came naturally—Howard was not patronizing in any way. He was willing to confront in discussion what a lot of white students weren't. He would hold his ground. He would respect that I knew forty-two million times more about being black than he did. But that didn't mean he couldn't hold a view on something relating to civil rights that would be as valid as mine. There were lots of well-meaning people at Yale who wanted you to understand that they understood your plight; you'd get into a conversation and they would yield too soon, so we didn't get the full benefit of the exchange. Howard very much thought he was capable of working an issue through. He was inquisitive. And when he came to a conclusion he would be as strong as anybody else. I don't think he's stubborn. He's a guy who's always been comfortable in his own skin. That's something you still see in him today, and it gets him into some degree of controversy."

Dawson was referring, with tactful obliqueness, to the emblem of the Dean style, his vaunted "unscriptedness"—which, by his own reckoning, constitutes both his Achilles heel and his appeal. "You're going to find out that to my detriment and my credit I don't often think about the political consequences of what I say," he told Tim Russert, on "Meet the Press," last March, when the stakes were, in retrospect, much lower. A month earlier, Dean had declared, during a speech before the winter meeting of the Democratic National Committee, "I intend to talk about race during this election in the South. The Republicans have been talking about it since 1968 in order to divide us, and I'm going to bring us together. Because you know what? White folks in the South who drive pickup trucks with Confederate flag decals on the back ought to be voting with us and not them, because their kids don't have health insurance, either, and their kids need better schools, too." In response, he received a standing ovation from the racially mixed audience.

Of course, the group of partisans listening to Dean that day were willing to forgive his lapse into caricature. When, in November, he fed an abbreviation of the same quote to a reporter from the Des Moines *Register* ("I still want to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks"), the effect was incendiary. Several of his opponents accused him of pandering to Southern bigots; Dean, characteristically but clumsily, held his ground, further inciting his gleeful antagonists. Within twenty-four hours, an accumulation of editorial backlash and criticism from his own supporters forced him to apologize.

But Dean's contrition did not include a retreat from the rationale of his message, which was a tactical and philosophical, if wishful, argument for inclusiveness. ("We have had white Southern working people voting Republican for thirty years, and they've got nothing to show for it," he explained. "We're not going to win in this country . . . if we don't have a big tent.") When the other contenders pounced, their rhetoric had the aroma of demagoguery. Dean had been stalwart in defense of affirmative action and harshly critical of what he deemed the Bush Administration's tactics of racial divisiveness. The problem resided not in his logic but in his choice of metaphor (one that, presumably, had not been fashioned by consultants). As a result, when publicly confronted, during a televised debate on CNN in November, by the Reverend Al Sharpton, the Tawana Brawley personal groomer turned faux statesman, he had been incapable of adopting a conciliatory tone.

"When people get in my face, I tend to get in theirs," Dean told the *Times* the next day. "Al Sharpton was in my face last night and I was not going to step one step, half a step, backwards, and I don't care who's in my face."

Throughout the early campaign, Dean has made statements that his critics immediately seized upon for being needlessly inflammatory. Most notoriously, he declared in a December speech that "the capture of Saddam has not made America safer." Lieberman was the first to respond; he issued a caustic statement claiming that Dean had climbed into his own "spider hole of denial." Kerry and Clark soon released equally strong denunciations, but Dean refused to back down; in fact, he sharpened his rhetoric. In a speech two weeks later before an Iowa audience, he noted that the Administration had just raised the nation's national threat level to high risk, or Code Orange. "If we are safer, how come we lost ten more troops and raised the safety alert?" he demanded. "All the other Democrats pounced on me and beat me up and said how ignorant I was about foreign affairs. I think most people in America agree with me."

For Dean's Yale contemporaries, the spring of 1970 remains a watershed, a reference point of enlightenment as well as disillusion. The precipitating circumstance was an impending murder-conspiracy trial, in a New Haven courthouse, of several members of the Black Panther Party. Thousands of demonstrators, it was predicted, would descend on the city May Day weekend, and the university had to decide how to prepare. Normal academic business was put on hold as students and faculty, anticipating who knew what, engaged in intense self-scrutiny. In classrooms, ad-hoc teach-ins, and ubiquitous bull(shit) sessions, a previously insular community grappled—in ways novel, naïve, fatuous, and noble—with issues of race, class, criminal justice, and liberal hypocrisy. (A parallel source of agitation was America's recent invasion of Cambodia, which led to the killings, during a May antiwar protest, of four students at Kent State University by Ohio National Guard troops.)

Over dinner with several reporters in Seattle during the Sleepless Tour, and during a subsequent interview with me, Dean reminisced about his experiences at Yale. He had been, for the most part, a passive observer of the turbulence—moderate and open-minded but "very uncomfortable" with the radical left.

"Even though I majored in political science, clearly I'd given up on politics, perhaps by my sophomore year," he said. "I attribute that to the war and the attack by Nixon on the civil-rights movement. I decided I wasn't going to be able to change the country, because the government wasn't a true democracy. So I did things like tutoring—I tutored poor kids in a New Haven middle school—the sort of thing you do when you're trying to change one life at a time, not the whole system.

"Yale was an extraordinary, incredible place to be because of the changes that were going on there. I didn't work that hard—I didn't kill myself to get grades, except in classes I really loved—but I wanted to learn a lot. It wasn't unusual for me to take extra courses; instead of the required nine course credits a year, I'd take ten or eleven. I took courses about the wider world: Marxism, philosophy, different societies, particularly African. I took a lot of history. One professor who made a big impression was Wolfgang Leonhard, who taught Russian history. He'd been a Party official in East Germany and had defected. A fantastic lecturer. He once told us, '*Pravda* lies in such a way that not even the opposite is so.' That really hit home. I felt he wasn't just referring to the Soviet government but to our own at the time. You knew it from some of the things Nixon talked about—denying the bombing of Cambodia—or from Kissinger's 'Peace is at hand' statement, when clearly peace wasn't at hand. They said these things just to get reëlected. I think there are some similarities between George Bush's Administration and Richard Nixon's Administration: a tremendous cynicism about the future of the country; a lack of ability to instill hope in the American people; a war which doesn't have clear principles behind it; and a group of people around the President whose main allegiance is to each other and their ideology rather than to the United States."

In the end, no blood was spilled in New Haven during the 1970 May Day spectacle, damage to university property was minimal, few protesters were arrested, many of us inhaled our first doses of tear gas, a colossal volume of gassy rhetoric was spewed. The most valuable legacy of that unique era was the recognition that, good intentions notwithstanding, one was not entitled to the satisfaction of a tidy sense of resolution. It took years to make sense of what we'd absorbed, but one easy short-term rationalization—driven home by Nixon's crushing defeat of George McGovern in the 1972 election and its bewildering aftermath, Watergate—was that conventional electoral politics offered inadequate solutions to what ailed American life.

With far less vacillation than most of his peers, Dean somehow assimilated those events and moved on, having conceived a way to reconcile himself to the nuts-and-bolts processes of politics and governance. By the end of the decade, he was licking envelopes and ringing doorbells in Burlington, Vermont, as a volunteer in Jimmy Carter's reëlection campaign, and two years after that he was elected to the state legislature. How had this happened? "I like to joke with Kurt Schmoke," Ralph Dawson told me. "I tell Kurt, 'Isn't it ironic how you wound up as the dean of Howard and he turned out to be Howard Dean?' "

In the summer of 1973, Howard Dean III asked Howard Dean, Jr., to join him for dinner at a Manhattan restaurant. Prudently waiting until his father was well into his second Martini, he proceeded to the business at hand: his belief that his life was headed in a purposeless direction. Since leaving New Haven, he'd spent several idle months in Aspen, Colorado—abetted by a medical deferment from the draft (for a back condition that didn't interfere with his ability to ski or work part time pouring concrete). Upon his return to New York, he had situated himself, to his father's pleasure, on Wall Street, first as a broker and then as a junior manager of a mutual fund. But he found the work dispiriting; the pursuit of money gave him no satisfaction. He had a different scenario in mind: becoming a physician. The idea of a medical career appealed to Dean's faith in the efficacy of "trying to change one life at a time." For several months, without his parents' knowledge, he'd moonlighted as an emergency-room volunteer at St. Vincent's Hospital, near his apartment in Greenwich Village, and he'd begun taking pre-med courses at Columbia University. Now he was asking to move home, and go back on the dole, while he attended school full time.

"My father's reaction was terrific," Dean told me. "Years later, he admitted that he thought I was nuts. But he never said so at the time, which was a real tribute to him, because he was also very direct. If he had revealed what he was really thinking, it would have made it a lot more difficult—it just would have been harder for me to swim upstream—but he was very supportive."

Within the immediate family, father and son were Big Howard and Little Howard. (As adults, they made a matched pair: five feet eight, compactly built.) Big Howard, who died in 2001, was an affable alpha male, a confident, gravel-voiced, happy capitalist who had followed his father to Yale and Wall Street and done quite well. During the Second World War, ineligible for combat because of complications from diphtheria in childhood, he left Yale and got a job with Pan Am in Nigeria and Sudan, helping coördinate supply logistics for the Allies fighting in North Africa. Later, he did similar work in India and Asia. He came home in 1946, and the following year he married Andrée Maitland, a Barnard College sophomore. Already, he was busy making money. He had a born salesman's gregariousness; in a small leather notebook, he maintained an index of his favorite dirty jokes. He started out as a stockbroker (and before long became a partner) at Harris, Upham; in the early nineties, he retired as a senior executive of Dean Witter (no family connection). His four sons—Howard (born in 1948), Charlie (1950), Jim (1954), and Bill (1955)—all attended St. George's, where he served as a trustee. Big Howard voted Republican and lived like one. He took hunting and golf seriously. In East Hampton, he built a waterfront home, on land purchased by his father in the nineteen-forties—the Deans had settled on eastern Long Island in the seventeenth century—and joined the exclusionary Maidstone Club (no Jews, no blacks, no apologies). One of his regrets was his failure, unlike his own father, to get elected president of Maidstone.

According to his son, however, he harbored convictions about status and class that didn't fit the rest of the picture. "I think the fact that my father was so sick when he was young had a profound effect upon him," Dean said. "He had an enormous understanding of people and what they had to go through in life. One of the things I really remember feeling shame about was anytime we made presumptions that had to do with the fact that we

The Dean family in the mid-nineteen-sixties (clockwise from top): Andrée, Bill, Howard III, Howard, Jr., Charlie, and Jim.

COURTESY DEAN FAMILY

had money and other people didn’t or that someone who went to public school wasn’t as good as we were. He was very clear always, with all four of us, that status had absolutely nothing to do with money and heritage. You could put my father in a room with twelve people of any status, who had no idea who each other were, and he’d have them all talking to each other within ten minutes.” Nevertheless, he remained a creature of certain old-school prejudices. “In that generation, it wasn’t uncommon to be anti-Semitic. He’d say things anti-Semitic and the next day a Jewish partner would be in our apartment having drinks. And he never made a connection that there was a disconnect there.”

If Dean’s father had qualms about his son’s choice of medical school—Albert Einstein College of Medicine, in the Bronx, which was founded by Jews in part to benefit minorities who had been discriminated against by other institutions—he kept them to himself. It’s probably a stretch to infer that Dean talked his way into Einstein, but his talent for persuasion is evident from the notes of his admissions interview, which were excavated last summer by the Boston *Globe*. “ ‘Grades too miserable to discuss,’ ” Dr. Russell Anderson, the interviewer, wrote, quoting Dean’s own characterization of his Yale transcript. (In fact, Dean had compiled a roughly B-minus average.) It was when Dean described his motivation that he made the most favorable impression. He expressed himself with the maturity of “a man twice his age,” Anderson observed. “He convinced me of an affinity for the sick, seldom seen with much frequency anymore.”

Dean entered Einstein in the fall of 1975, in an accelerated program that allowed him to complete his course work in three years, rather than the standard four. In 1979, a year into his residency training at the University of Vermont, he was joined in Burlington by Judith Steinberg, a fellow Einstein graduate. They married in 1981, and after she had completed a fellowship at McGill University, in Montreal, they became professional partners as well, specializing in family practice.

Steinberg, the daughter of two doctors, had grown up in Roslyn, New York, a predominantly Jewish suburb on Long Island, and graduated from Princeton, where she majored in biochemistry. A slender, vanity-free woman who, in photographs, appears to be hiding behind her eyeglasses and long dark hair, she gives the impression of being Dean’s temperamental opposite—cerebral, soft-spoken, animated when discussing her work or her children (Anne, a Yale sophomore, and Paul, a high-school senior), but otherwise intensely shy and publicity-averse. To all appearances, the Deans have reached a mutually satisfactory arrangement: he speaks glowingly of her intelligence and professional dedication; she hasn’t compromised her career for the sake of his, nor does she seem much interested in politics—except insofar as it has a direct impact upon their family.

During Dean’s years as governor, Steinberg was barely visible, granting only a handful of interviews. So far in the Presidential campaign, she has proved equally elusive. (One evening last summer, she made a surprise visit to the Burlington campaign headquarters because she wanted to watch one of the Democratic candidates’ debates; the Deans don’t have cable.) Should her family relocate to Pennsylvania Avenue, Steinberg has stated, she would like to continue practicing medicine. Asked to describe her technique as a diagnostician, she told *New York*, “I’m a very methodical person; I do all the tests.” And her husband’s? “Howard tends to jump to conclusions. He’s usually right, but he just leaps.” Likewise, during Dean’s residency, one of his supervisors wrote in an evaluation, “Howard is a very solid resident, a good teacher, intellectual in his approach. His major problem continues to be one of impulsive syntheses when problems are approached. He should take care to be more deliberate in making assessments and deciding upon plans. Because of this trait, he is not quite the superior physician that he is in other respects.”

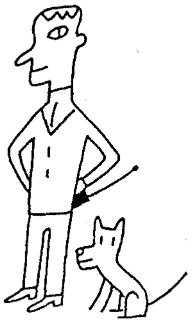
THE PESSIMIST AND THE PARANOID
That glass is half empty.
That glass is too close to the edge of the table. It's going to FALL and BREAK and SOMEBODY'S GOING TO STEP ON A SHARD and GET HURT! What IS that liquid, anyway? Something caustic, no doubt...
R. Chast

The most common knock on Dean—that his candidacy is inordinately one of critique, that he is an “angry” insurgent who biliously attacks the Bush Administration’s policies while neglecting to provide a coherent and positive alternative vision—originates from within his own party (a meta-critique engendered by a mortal fear of the evil-genius spinmeistering of the other party), gets amplified by the punditocracy, and, should he win the nomination, will likely become a Republican theme. Given Dean's own admission that he doesn't plot things out terribly far in advance—"I never think about, Well, if I say this now, what's going to happen later on?" he told me—it's fair to say that he didn't see this coming in midsummer of 2002, when he and what passed for his brain trust "had no idea what we were doing." What has transpired since then is attributable not only to Dean's talent and energy but to a concatenation of fortuitous factors, including certain types of luck that no one should ever hope for—most notably, the ongoing chaos in Iraq.

Well into the summer of 2002, Dean's criticisms of Bush were focussed almost entirely on domestic issues: health care, tax cuts, deficits, education, the rightward-skewing of judicial appointments. For contrast, Dean would cite his record in Vermont, especially his health-care and child-advocacy initiatives and his rigor as a budget-balancing fiscal conservative.

"As far as domestic policy is concerned, I can't think of anything he's done that I agree with," Dean said, according to David Broder, of the Washington *Post*, in late June, at a kaffeeklatsch of ten Democrats in Waterloo, Iowa. Broder wrote that Dean "added, almost as a throwaway line, 'I think he's done a good job on the war on terrorism.' " By then, the White House clearly had Saddam Hussein on the brain: Bush, in his State of the Union Message, asserted that Iraq was part of an "axis of evil"; Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, and Paul Wolfowitz were aggressively pushing for Saddam's overthrow; Vice-President Dick Cheney warned of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, calling them a "gathering danger" that required "the most decisive response by America and its allies." And since shortly after September 11th the Patriot Act—whose draftsman and enforcer, John Ashcroft, Dean nowadays routinely excoriates as an archfoe of civil liberties—had been a key component of the war on terrorism.

As Dean campaigned—in Iowa, in particular—he increasingly heard voters question the methods and efficacy of the war on terrorism. He paid attention and soon began to echo these doubts. On August 15th, Rice alluded to "a very powerful moral case for regime change," and a week later Cheney warned that the United States could face devastating consequences if it delayed in removing Saddam. In the interval, Dean, in New Hampshire, implicitly dismissed the former assertion and contradicted the latter. An invasion would be justified, he said, only if Bush provided evidence that Saddam "has either atomic or biological weapons and can deliver them." He continued, "So far he has not made that case. So where's the threat? We need to see that evidence." Dean warned that in the wake of an invasion "America must be prepared for a ten-year conflict in the most dangerous region of the world." Back in Iowa, around Labor Day, he predicted that to build a democracy in a post-Saddam Iraq, "Americans are going to have to die and a lot of money is going to be spent." The second week in October, Congress obliged Bush's request for authority to invade Iraq in order to remove weapons of mass destruction. Three of the Democratic Presidential contenders in the Senate—John Kerry, Joe Lieberman, and John Edwards—voted for the resolution, as did Dick Gephardt, who had been one of its authors, in the House.



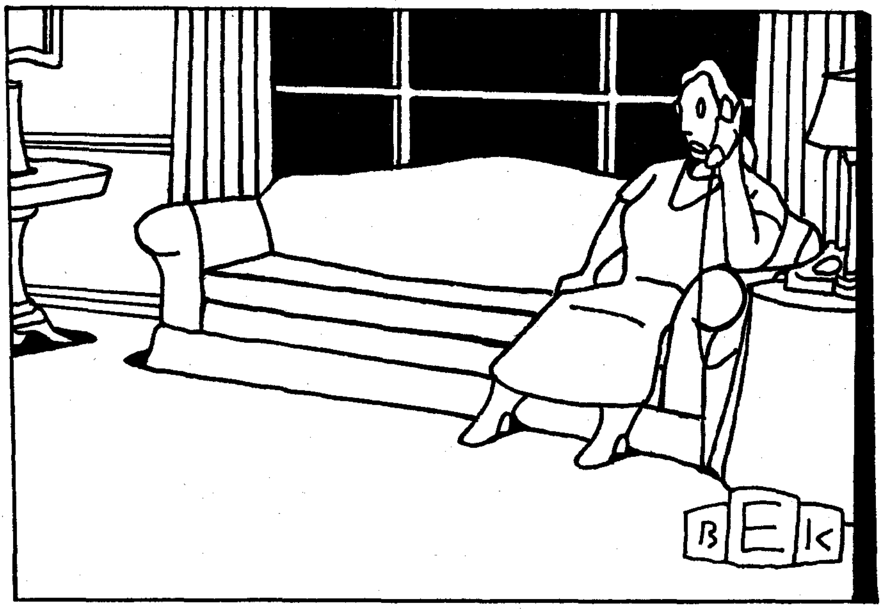
Dean, of course, did not have to vote. His rivals' votes, however, in effect forged his identity as the insurgent, though not many people outside Iowa or New Hampshire, other than the professional touts inside the Beltway, yet perceived it. In January, 2003, the Dean campaign had a paid staff of seven (up from three the previous month), a thousand-square-foot headquarters above the Vermont Pub & Brewery in downtown Burlington, and a hundred and fifty-seven thousand dollars in the bank. But, with the Internet as catalyst, a dazzling sequence of fund-raising and message-disseminating tactics was about to be set in motion, and the campaign was about to quicken in a fashion unprecedented in American politics. What was most remarkable about the synchrony of these events—the bullet-in-the-foot Iraq-invasion votes by Kerry et al.; the deepening revulsion toward Bush among Democrats; and the ripening of the Internet as a political-gospel-spreading and fund-raising medium—was the swiftness and precision with which they delivered Dean, their semi-accidental beneficiary, where he needed to be.

A close runner-up to plugging into the Internet as the pivotal moment in the campaign—the transition from "Dean who?" to "Dean, whoa!"—was the candidate's speech before the Democratic National Committee last February. Seven candidates addressed several hundred expectant listeners gathered in Washington; only Dean's remarks were memorable. He began:

"What I want to know is why in the world the Democratic Party leadership is supporting the President's unilateral attack on Iraq." (Some applause, a few people on their feet.) "What I want to know is why are Democratic Party leaders supporting tax cuts. The question is not how big the tax cut should be. The question should be 'Can we afford a tax cut at all with the largest deficit in the history of this country?' " (Applause, followed by a few more rhetorical iterations of what he wanted to know, leading into . . .) "I'm Howard Dean, and I'm here to represent the *Democratic* wing of the Democratic Party." (Big applause, cheers.)

This last line Dean had blithely, some would say shamelessly, purloined from the late Senator Paul Wellstone, of Minnesota. A less naked, and more inspired, bit of plagiarism was his trope "*You* have the power to take our country back!" This he appropriated from the vituperatively anti-Dean "Take Back Vermont" movement, which began in 2000 as a reaction to his signing of the civil-unions bill, which established previously denied rights—hospital visitation, health insurance, inheritance—for gay and lesbian couples.

Conceptual credit for the fact that "*You* have the power!" possesses a functional application—that it becomes tangible to anyone with an e-mail address—largely belongs to Joe Trippi, the campaign manager, who originally served Dean as a media consultant; he didn't officially become campaign manager until last March (succeeding Rick Ridder, who departed after four months). Trippi's career as a national political operative dates to Edward M. Kennedy's 1980 run for the Presidency. In



"Apparently, they're going through a very bitter courtship."

• •

the late nineties, feeling disillusioned, he went to work in Silicon Valley as a marketing consultant. But he found himself still drawn to politics, and in time he became an avid reader of political Weblogs, or blogs, which led to speculations about the Internet's applicability to political organizing. Late in 2002, when Dean complained about his chronic shortage of funds, Trippi proposed using the Internet to build a base of supporters. As they discussed how the process might work, one of Dean's questions was "What's a blog?" In Vermont, Dean's staff regarded him as a Luddite. But, listening to Trippi, he grasped the idea of a blog as a running political-debate forum, with an abundantly flexible capacity to receive and broadcast ideas and opinions, and suddenly Dean—who didn't use a computer until 1998 and who had refused to have a government e-mail address—was a technophile.

Last January, three months before an interactive Dean Web page came into being, supporters on both coasts were discovering each other online through Yahoo.com. The same month, Meetup.com, a new Internet service that made it possible for like-minded folk—hood-ornament collectors, ferret owners—to find each other and congregate in local communities, began listing gatherings for people interested in various political candidates. Thanks, in part, to an unsolicited assist from an ardent blogger in Oregon, more than five hundred people registered for Dean meetups by early February—far more than for any other candidate. By this time, Trippi had negotiated a bargain-rate contract with Meetup, which allowed the campaign to sponsor its own events and to begin to compile what, at last count, had become a list of more than a half million e-mail addresses.

Dean likes to say that he didn't seek out the Internet as much as it discovered him. After his speech to the Democratic National Committee, the online buzz spiked. E-mail to the Burlington headquarters burgeoned from fifty to several hundred messages a day. Eager pilgrims, mostly in their early twenties, started showing up there in late winter. (Disclosure alert: My own seventeen-year-old son became one of the so-called Deanie Babies; he spent last summer in Burlington, interning at campaign headquarters.) More help conveniently arrived via MoveOn.org, the 2.4-million-member activist group that was founded in Berkeley in 1998, as a liberal response to the Clinton impeachment. (Dean, by the way, told me that he hadn't heard of MoveOn until 2003.) MoveOn had offered its getting-out-the-word wisdom to all the Democratic candidates. Dean was the only one to accept; his campaign briefly hired a MoveOn employee who helped redesign and upgrade its Web site, which was rendered far more effective for organizing and fund-raising. The result has been a genuine grassroots marvel. At last count, according to the campaign, there have been more than ten thousand Dean-related "Get Local" events around the country (some purely social, others involving labor-intensive community service or political organizing). The current incarnation of the Web site has links to dozens of blogs, dozens more "unofficial Dean sites" (Doctors for Dean, Dykes for Dean, Foodies for Dean, Mormons for Dean, Unemployed for Dean), and more than five hundred regional sites. More than nine hundred Generation Dean groups have been established in colleges and high schools.

Money, naturally, has been the most consequential by-product of this process. At the end of the first quarter of 2003, Dean had raised less than $3 million, and the majority had come from affluent liberals. This was well behind both Edwards ($7.4 million, helped along by his fellow trial lawyers) and the impeccably credentialled, cinematically Presidential-looking Kerry (more than $10 million). By the summer, when Dean's prescience about the war's troubling aftermath had crystallized in the minds of the public, the fund-raising picture looked very different. During the second quarter, he raised $7.6 million (compared with Edwards's $5.1 million and Kerry's $5.8 million). More striking than the total was the way it added up, with contributions, almost half of which flowed through the Web site, averaging seventy-seven dollars. Only one in eight donations to the other Democrats was for less than two hundred dollars. Dean was vaulting ahead, and he was doing it with a sporting disregard for the conventional wisdom.

Soon enough, the Dean backlash commenced, heralded by dire emanations from the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, the wellspring of Clintonism. "It is our belief that the Democratic Party has an important choice to make. Do we want to vent or do we want to govern?" Senator Evan Bayh, the D.L.C.'s chairman, said, doing some venting of his own. "The Administration is being run by the far right. The Democratic Party is in danger of being taken over by the far left."

Will Marshall, who runs the Progressive Policy Institute, a think-tank offshoot of the D.L.C., suggested to me that not only was Dean both philosophically out of step with his own party and hypocritically disingenuous but he was also exploiting liberal resentment that has simmered ever since the centrists commandeered the Democratic Party during the nineties (though much of the left was reasonably content while Clinton was in the White House). Dean was essentially a centrist, Marshall said, who had leveraged his opposition to the war, broadening it so that "the centrist morphs into this full-throated tribune of left-leaning activists."

"At the bottom," Marshall continued, "is this left-wing fantasy of a mass mobilization of disaffected voters, a belief that if we're only left enough and pure enough in our hatred we'll create this mass movement. The intensity Dean has tapped into is narrow. There's no question he's got the most enthusiastic base of support out there. But, however intensely you feel for Howard Dean, you only have one vote. Intensity is important in politics, but you've also got to have breadth. I don't believe they've proven that they've tapped into this whole new reservoir of support. That's what makes the Dean campaign reminiscent of McGovern's—it's the postgraduate proletariat, on the two coasts, plus a dollop of Hollywood liberals. It could be that our electoral market analysis is suddenly wrong. Maybe the country has shifted several quantum degrees to the left. Maybe I took a long nap and missed it."

Such complaints cast Dean's candidacy as an organ transplant that the inside-the-Beltway corpus had no choice but to reject. But the question remained: if Dean stood no chance of beating Bush, where was the evidence that any other contender—none of whom had created an organization remotely as vigorous as his—could do better? Considering that many experts believe that young people will emerge as the swing voters of the 2004 election, it seemed strange to discount Dean's gift for capturing their enthusiasm. Moreover, the D.L.C.'s fear of an insurgent candidacy was possibly misguided: in 1980, an outsider named Ronald Reagan took on the Republican establishment and triumphed.

At first, Dean rarely seemed fazed by the steady barrage of criticism from his challengers (foremost from Lieberman, Kerry, and Gephardt). When ganged up on in several televised debates, he raised his eyebrows, tightened his jaw, counterpunched selectively, and stayed on his feet.

During one early debate, Gephardt went after Dean for having endorsed, in the mid-nineties, a Newt Gingrich scheme to lower the growth rate of Medicare. Twisting the dagger, Gephardt added, "You've been saying for many months that you're the head of the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party. I think you're just winging it."

Dean, who had supported Gephardt during his 1988 Presidential run, replied in kind. "That is flat-out false, and I'm ashamed that you would compare me with Newt Gingrich," he said. "Nobody up here deserves to be compared to Newt Gingrich. I did say that Medicare was a dreadful program because it's administered dreadfully. I've done more for health insurance, Dick Gephardt, frankly, than you ever have, because I've delivered it to a lot of seniors and a lot of young people."

Since then, the attacks from Dean's rivals have grown more pointed. Opposition research has yielded fodder for allegations of flip-flops—shifts, over the years, in Dean's statements about Medicare, the Social Security minimum age, the North American Free Trade Agreement. Dean has consistently tried to talk his way past these alleged reversals. Some of these off-the-cuff retorts have been clever: When Kerry accused Dean of having sided with the Republicans on Medicare in 1995, Dean upended the accusation by joking, "These guys can't make up their minds whether I'm Newt Gingrich or George McGovern!" Other responses have been feeble. After Dean was widely criticized for touting as an "interesting theory" the unfounded idea that Bush had been forewarned by Saudi Arabia of the September 11th catastrophe, he told the Washington *Post*, "I acknowledged that I did not believe the theory I was putting out."

Dean has been similarly unable to deflect the fallout from his puzzling decision last January to place about half of his official records as governor under seal until 2013. At the time, he told a group of Vermont reporters, "We didn't want anything embarrassing appearing in the papers at a critical time in any future endeavor." In December, Dean asserted that he had been joking when he made the statement. This defense was far from convincing; John Dillon, the journalist who had initially reported Dean's remarks, recalled: "He wasn't giving the punch line of a joke; he was answering a question. . . . He can sometimes be extremely candid." Joe Lieberman, once again, was the first to express dismay over Dean's demurral, calling it "a long way from straight talk."

The result of such assaults has been the opposite of Dean's critics' intentions, however—a highly remunerative jujitsu. Lieberman's constant gibes, in particular, have confirmed to many voters that Dean

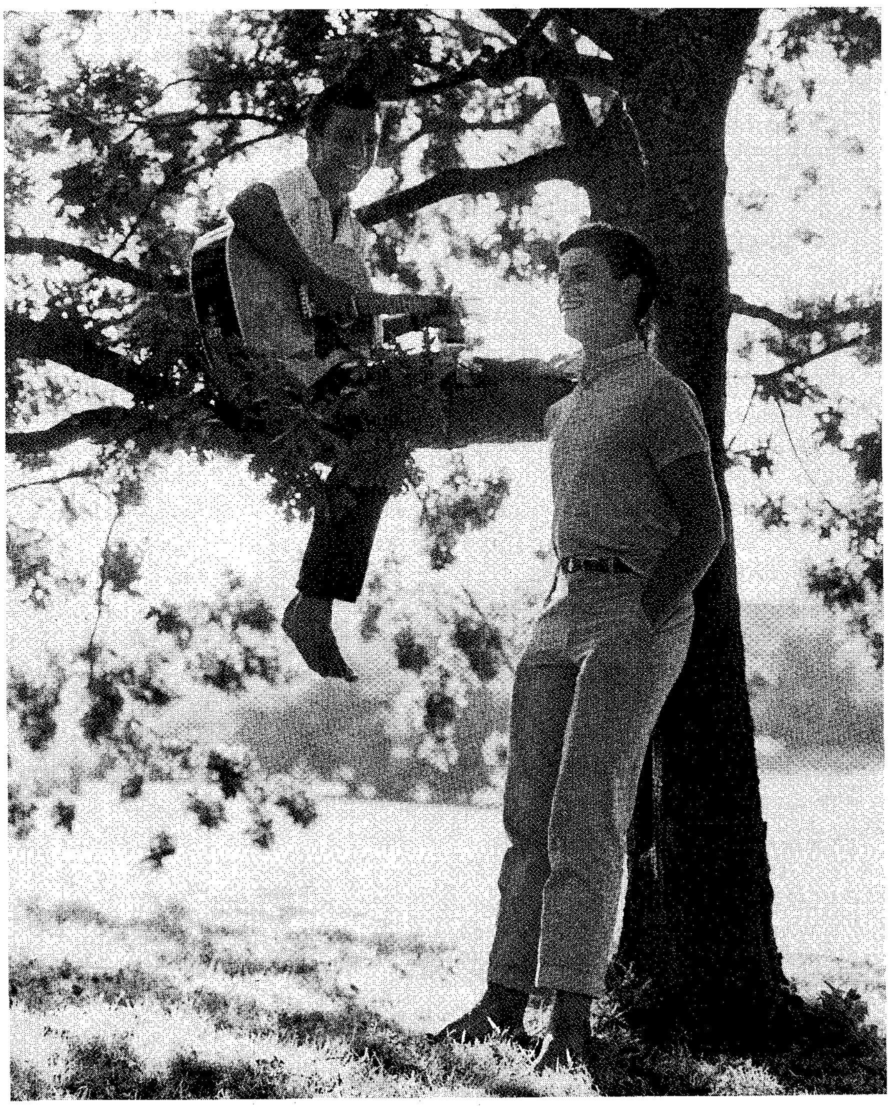
"I get it—the old caffeinated-cop, decaffeinated-cop routine."

is an authentic rebel against the Democratic establishment. Each time that Dean comes under fire, the blogs and the grassroots rally behind him, and more money flows to Burlington. Between July and September, as the attacks on him grew more fervid, he raised almost fifteen million—a third of it in ten days (smashing, by more than four million dollars, a single-quarter Democratic record set by Clinton in 1995). The machine seemed so well oiled that he announced in November that he would forgo nineteen million in public funds during the primaries, thereby circumventing a forty-five-million-dollar spending cap. In the final three months of 2003, Dean raised an additional fourteen million. It was an odd turn of events, to say the least, for a candidate who early in his campaign had ruefully predicted that he would finish "dead last in fund-raising."

The genesis parable of Dean's political career, grounded in the singular dark moment of his biography, is this:

In the fall of 1974—while Dean is enrolled at Columbia, completing his pre-med studies—his brother Charlie, his closest sibling, sixteen months his junior (Jim and Bill are, respectively, five and seven years younger), disappears while travelling in Southeast Asia. The family receives a message from the State Department that Charlie is being held prisoner in Laos by Pathet Lao guerrillas. Eight months later, word comes that he is probably dead, though there is no body to recover. Dean's sense of public duty—so goes the theory—derives from a desire to honor Charlie's unfulfilled destiny. Every day on the campaign trail, he wears his brother's black leather belt.

To this day, no one knows quite what Charlie Dean was doing in Laos or how he died. Of the four boys, he was the most extroverted—strong-willed and audacious, instinctively drawn to politics and instinctively liberal, always game to provoke Big Howard during dinner-table debates. When he was a teen-ager, he spent several summers as a counsellor in a camp for impoverished black and Hispanic children from New York City. At St. George's, he was president of his class, and at the University of North Carolina, too, he served in student government. He proved more susceptible to the Zeitgeist than his older brother, and his convictions progressed leftward. In 1972, during his senior year, he became campus chairman of the McGovern campaign. After graduating, he passed up a Peace Corps assignment in Nepal to work full time for McGovern. When that ended in dismal disappointment, he retreated to East Hampton. "Well, I think I've finally crashed from a dynamite trip," he wrote to a friend.



Howard Dean (in the tree) with his brother Charlie, who would disappear in Laos.

COURTESY DEAN FAMILY

But the next year he launched himself on what was to have been an around-the-world adventure. He sailed to Japan aboard a freighter, went next to Bali, and then to Australia, where he spent nine months working on a ranch. From there, he and a friend headed for Laos. Why Laos, the bombing range next door to Vietnam, where the war, though waning, had not yet ended? Or—if you're twenty-four years old, fearless, and possessed of a robust sense of entitlement—why not? Charlie and an Australian friend were aboard a ferry on the Mekong River between Laos and Thailand when the Pathet Lao took them into custody. Because they were taking photographs, the Pathet Lao might have mistaken them for spies. Or their crime might have been that Charlie, by virtue of his American passport, was simply the enemy.

Andrée Dean's burnished memory of her son is that Charlie was the one most like the father. "I think my husband felt very in tune with Charlie," she told me. "I think he felt Charlie was going to follow in his footsteps. They must have had the same thought processes. He was quite bossy. Used to boss his brothers around. He was very organized. I think that's what [Big] Howard bonded with. Charlie was shrewd. Smart but street-smart, too. No one tried to talk him out of going on that trip."

Nor, afterward, did anyone talk much

about what had happened, least of all Big Howard, who basically decreed the matter off limits, too painful. The taboo remained until his death, and it wasn't until the following year, 2002, that Dean permitted himself to go to Laos. There—in part because a Pentagon task force had accumulated much information about Americans missing in Southeast Asia—Dean was able to visit the spot where, he was told, his brother had been buried. Only at that point did the Charlie legend circulate in Vermont; reporters who had been covering Dean for years had had no idea.

In mid-November, it was announced that Charlie's remains had been found, though not in the place Dean had been escorted to. Confronted with questions from reporters about his emotional reaction to this discovery, he was neither evasive nor indulgent. "When you go through something like this, you have a tremendous sense of survivor's guilt and anger," he said. "Anger at the person who disappeared and guilt over the anger. It's very complicated." A month earlier—at the time, I was flying with Dean from Detroit to Baltimore—he had even broached the subject with me, in response to my question about his avoidance of autobiography.

"That I don't talk about my background, I have a feeling, is what makes me as passionate and intense as I am," he said. "If I laid out the biography for everybody to kind of ooh and ah, it would be gone. I know this is sort of Zen-like. I don't really have this down. The fact is, the experiences that are the most intense in my life are the ones that are not readily available to me, so they come out in a different way. I think that has a lot to do with my desire to have social justice, the passion I have about fairness and truthtelling. The two are connected. The fact that I'm the least autobiographical is very much connected with the fact that I'm the most passionate. Experiences that I don't have access to consciously are what drive me—personal experiences that I can't tell you about because I haven't processed them."

"What experiences might those be?" I asked.

"Aspects of my brother getting killed. Aspects of, who knows, whatever went on in my childhood. That sort of thing."

Dean spent time in psychotherapy in the early eighties, but only briefly. "I was in therapy because I was having grief reactions over my brother's death," he told me. "And when that was done I was done." When asked why he had waited until eight years after his brother's death to pursue treatment, he said, "I don't know. I don't know why it never came up, other than the fact that I was really, really busy. I was in medical school, then I was in my residency. And then I just started getting anxiety attacks and I didn't know why." He paused. "I don't want to overplay this. I never missed a day of work. I went once a week, then once every two weeks, then once a month. Looking back, I think my daughter being born"—in 1984—"had something to do with not needing to go anymore. It was really a matter of talking out stuff that needed to be talked out. It was a great process. But I had a lot of other things to do."

The defining elements of Vermont politics are its congruent traditions of hardscrabble agrarian conservatism (evident in the rural poverty juxtaposed with the Currier & Ives back-roads scenery) and bona-fide participatory democracy (still flourishing in the ritual of the town meeting). Of no less consequence are fundamental facts of scale: a statewide population of 613,000 (smaller than metropolitan Omaha) and an annual budget of a billion dollars—too measly for pomp or, for that matter, lucrative corruption. A Dean supporter in Burlington described for me the no-frills flavor of his inaugural celebrations. "My wife and I got invited a couple of times," he said. "Believe me, it's not an inaugural ball. It's just a thing at the statehouse. You get in line and say congratulations, and afterwards you go out to dinner with friends."

It's an all-purpose metaphor, a distillation of Dean's personal and professional styles. (A while back, on the "Tonight Show," Dean regaled Jay Leno with a shaggy-dog story about a hundred-and-twenty-five-dollar suit from J.C. Penney that he couldn't bring himself to get rid of because he's such a tightwad.) The bipartisan book on Dean—an appraisal based upon his four years in the legislature, four-plus as lieutenant governor, and eleven as governor, at the end of which, in 2002, Vermont had a fresh history of balanced budgets (and, unlike almost every other state in the union, an ample rainy-day fund)—is that he was accessible and assiduous, uncuddly but decisive. He was a quintessential physician-politician—quick, occasionally too quick, to diagnose and react. As governor, he held a weekly press conference whose protocol consisted of a policy or program announcement followed by a free-form dialogue with reporters. At times he was engagingly ruminative when answering questions, at others testily abrupt. ("I think people should stop complaining and whining," he once said in response to a question.) Though Vermont has no official governor's residence, everyone knew where to reach him after hours; his home phone number was listed in the Burlington directory.

The succession of providential circumstances that has shaped Dean's Presidential campaign is, in fact, consonant with the history of his political career—a pattern that has prompted many veteran Deanologists to maintain that he is manifestly "the luckiest politician" they've ever observed. Case in point: In 1986, nearing the end of his second two-year term as a state representative, Dean confronts a tricky choice. He and his wife are expecting their second child; they will have to move out of their two-bedroom apartment—and out of Dean's tiny legislative district—in the North End of Burlington. They buy a suburban house in the South End of town, an area represented in the legislature by a Democrat whom Dean knows better than to challenge. He also rejects the option of running for Congress against another popular incumbent, the then (but no longer) Republican Jim Jeffords (now a United States Senator). The state senate district in Dean's new neighborhood is the largest in Vermont; he concludes that vying for lieutenant governor against an incumbent Republican is less problematic. Ten days after Dean declares his candidacy, the incumbent unexpectedly enters the governor's race (and loses). Dean is unopposed in his primary and draws a weak Republican opponent in the general election. After campaigning around the state in his pickup truck, he wins by nine points.

More luck, plus someone else's bad luck: It's 1990. Dean is in his second term as lieutenant governor. Politics hasn't as yet interfered with his medical practice; the lieutenant governor's only routine task is largely ceremonial—presiding over the senate. (The legislature is usually in session only from January to April.) The governor, a Democrat, decides not to stand for reëlection. Dean, regarded by fellow-Democrats as a savvy, reliable liberal, seems a likely potential successor and could probably get the nomination. But his children are still quite young and a gubernatorial campaign would necessitate a prohibitively long leave-of-absence from his medical practice. So he passes. Meanwhile, Richard Snelling, a crusty and formidable Republican former governor, realizes he wants his old job back. In the general election, Snelling defeats the Democrat. Dean is reëlected lieutenant governor.

On August 14, 1991, Snelling, while cleaning his swimming pool, drops dead of a heart attack. Dean is in his medical office, examining a patient, when he gets the news. Later that day, he's sworn in as governor.

Dean inherited from Snelling a sixty-five-million-dollar budget deficit. Just about anywhere else, this would have been chump change. But during a recession, in a tiny state with a paltry industrial-manufacturing tax base, it represented, per capita, a full-blown crisis. Fortunately, Dean also inherited a blueprint for a solution. Snelling and Ralph Wright, a liberal Democrat who was the Speaker of the House, had cut a deal that combined progressive tax increases with reductions in social spending. Not only did Dean adopt Snelling's plan in toto but he also retained most of Snelling's cabinet and staff, as well as his economic advisers from the Republican business community. During his first years in office, whatever criticism Dean endured tended to be from the left, from exasperated Ben & Jerry's types. The Snelling income-tax increases had five-year sunset provisions, and after they expired Dean made certain they weren't resuscitated. (Wright took to consoling his troops: "At least he's our Republican.") Dean's reputation, and Vermont's return to solvency, benefitted greatly from the Clinton economic boom. By 2001, the state had the highest bond rating in New England. Well before that, the liberals, having witnessed Dean's transformation into a practiced Clintonian triangulator, grasped that they were outmatched.

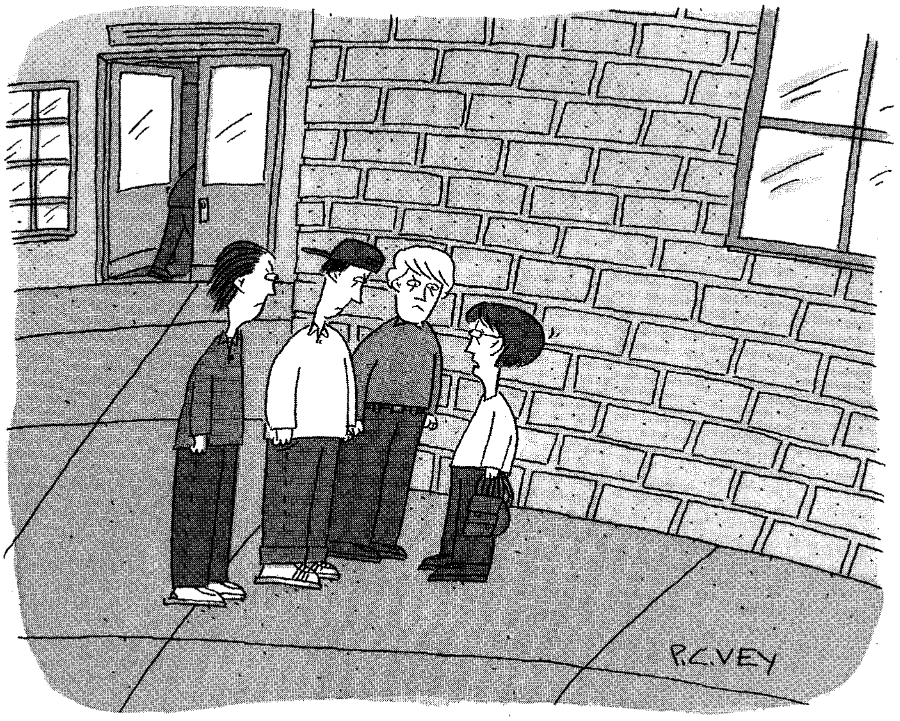
Once, when I told Dean that I'd been asking various Vermont political observers to define his ideology, he laughed and said, "I'll bet you didn't get anything out of that."

Actually, I did, but the responses implied that his actions weren't guided by abstract convictions: "Howard's success wasn't a function of ideology. I've never seen a politician who had a better grasp of the needs and desires of voters. To say that he governs by winging it may be a little glib—but there are no focus groups to help him figure out his positions. He read the New York *Times* every morning and went out and ran Vermont, and ninety-nine per cent of the time he did it beautifully." Or: "I have no idea, except that I think it's incredibly pragmatic. It's a little better than 'whatever works.' It's not that cynical. It's results-oriented."

When I pressed Dean for a self-definition, he said, "I think the best way, if you want to put me in a box, is to say 'fiscally conservative, socially progressive.' But when you drill down, my ideology is not easily characterized in a small amount of words."

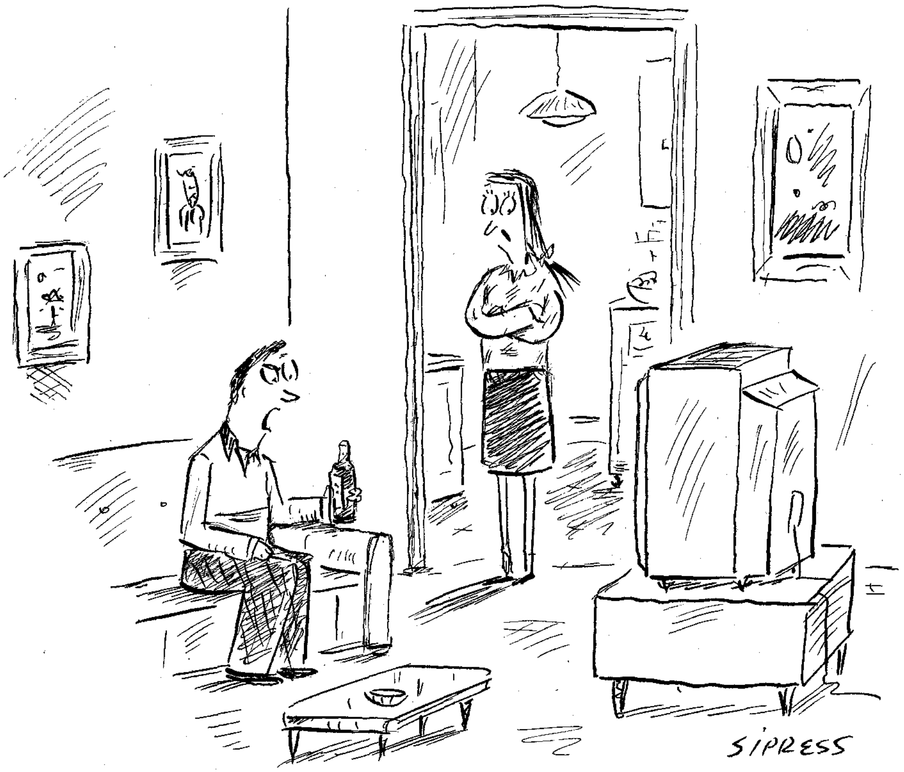
In a few key areas, Dean did establish common cause with Vermont liberals. After an overambitious Clintonian attempt to push through a wholesale reform of the state health-care system was thwarted, Dean spent the next several years achieving, piecemeal, the expensive but laudable goal of guaranteed health insurance for all residents under the age of eighteen (and coverage for ninety-two per cent of adults who previously had no insurance). Dean similarly pleased environmentalists when he placed four hundred and seventy thousand acres of Vermont land under permanent covenants that protect them from privatization or development. (Dean's official portrait in the statehouse, in Montpelier, shows him in shirtsleeves, khakis, and hiking boots, holding a canoe paddle; it is popularly referred to as L. L. Dean. Yet he was often at odds with certain environmentalists, who considered him too accommodating to business interests and too lax about sprawl.) And in 1992 Dean proposed Success by Six, an effort to identify individual-family needs in local communities and link them to social services—such as parenting training and day-care-enrollment assistance—in the hope of reducing child abuse, sexual abuse, and crime involving children under six. By the time he left office, there had been a forty-three-per-cent decline in reports of physical abuse and a seventy-per-cent decline in reports of sexual abuse of young children.

Of the laws enacted during Dean's tenure, the two that provoked the most pronounced hostility from conservatives were Act 60 (a complex education-funding overhaul that shifted the tax burden from poorer to wealthier towns) and the civil-unions bill, which raised Dean's national profile, especially among gay and lesbian activists. Both laws derived from man-



"All my lunch money's in real estate."

dates by the Vermont Supreme Court. And in both instances Dean was content to let legislators do the heavy lifting—the drafting and the lining up of votes. His desire to distance himself was nothing if not politically calculated, and it proved prescient. Act 60 and the civil-unions bill went into law in, respectively, 1997 and 1999; Dean's reëlection fights in 1998 and 2000 were by far his toughest.



"The pursuit of free agents in the off-season is too a sport."

In the running Washington conversation that poses the evergreen question "What would Karl do?"—i.e. Karl Rove, the Sun Tzu (or, if one prefers, the Beelzebubba) of the White House, the man who, it is generally assumed, spends his happiest moments anticipating George Bush versus Howard Dean next November—one source of intrigue has been how Rove might spin Dean's support for the civil-unions bill. Not long ago, I put the question to Kevin Ellis, a partner in Vermont's leading lobbying firm. His unhesitant reply was "If I'm Karl Rove, civil unions is my Willie Horton ad." Subsequently, the problem became even more worrisome for Dean, in light of the Massachusetts Supreme Court's ruling, in November, that mandated the legalization of same-sex marriage. Until that came along, Dean, on the stump, had got by with artfully non-specific allusions, including a rainbow-themed riff that went, "I am tired of being divided by race in this country! I am tired of being divided by income! I am tired of being divided by gender and sexual orientation." Following the Massachusetts decision, Dean and the other first-tier Democratic candidates chose their words with maximum circumspection. There was no stampede to endorse same-sex marriage (translation: "Yo, Karl! We will not fall on our swords"), but, at the same time, it was clear that they would resist the anticipated right-wing crusade to pass a federal constitutional amendment prohibiting it. Compared with that looming culture-war battle, the immediate challenge confronted by the Massachusetts legislature—obeying the court by writing the law—seems a minor detail.

Dean's body language and utterances as this plays out will make for interesting spectator sport. His conduct in Vermont conveyed a much more mixed message than any television advertising Rove might devise. Before the Vermont court case was decided, he refused to discuss the issue with reporters. Then, with the ball in the legislature's hands, he said—referring expressly to same-sex marriage, even though civil unions are a different species—"Like everyone else, I'm uncomfortable with it, too." When the time came for Dean to sign the bill, it was walked from the House clerk's office to his office, where, behind a closed door, he unceremoniously did so. This infuriated the press and the left, but they eventually got over it.

Ellis described for me an encounter with Dean at a pivotal juncture, four months before the bill was signed. "Our firm handled the civil-union campaign, on behalf of the gay and lesbian community in Vermont," he said. "Two lawyers who had argued the case before the Supreme Court hired us. I took those lawyers up to see Howard. This was a week after the court decision. He greeted us with 'This is not a civil-rights issue. You're not going to get everything you want. We disagree on this.' There was no 'Hello, congratulations, what an exciting time this must be.' Instead, it was 'You guys aren't going to get marriage—I'm not going as far as you want me to go.' " Ellis added, "Bear in mind, Howard never announced publicly that he didn't regard this as a civil-rights issue. He said that to us privately."

But over the ensuing months Dean talked to many gay Vermonters, and heard many stories of discrimination. According to Ellis, Dean "evolved on this issue," and before signing the bill he came to the conclusion that the legislation in fact rectified a civil-rights violation. On the stump now, Dean passionately proclaims his support for gay and lesbian rights. "How much of it was political calculation, how much is pure principle?" Ellis said, when asked about Dean's change of heart. "You tell me."

A rare candid—and quite grim—Dean family snapshot appeared on page 1 of the August 6th edition of the Burlington *Free Press* last summer. It captured Howard and Judy Dean and their seventeen-year-old son, Paul, as they arrived, the previous day, for an appointment in Costello Courthouse, in downtown Burlington. They had gone there to meet with a staff member of a court diversion program for youthful offenders—the youthful offense in question being Paul's participation several weeks earlier in the burglary of beer, champagne, and

Victoria Roberts

"You got a monkey on your back? I got three monkeys."

other spirits, worth a total of $549.88, from a storage shed at the Burlington Country Club, one of those indiscretions that tend not to delight Mom and Dad even when Dad isn't running for President. One mitigating circumstance—that Paul had not actually burgled but merely driven the car that transported four of his pals and the hooch from the scene of the crime—was deemed moot by the authorities. His misfeasance earned him many hours of community service, something to add (or perhaps not) to his résumé, along with his sterling high-school transcript and superb hockey skills.

Shortly after Paul's arrest, Dean officially kicked off his Presidential campaign. By far the most unscripted, and least comfortable, moment of that day occurred when Dean was asked how he planned to win over the same Democratic Party leaders he'd been criticizing for months. Once they really get to know me, he said, they'll come around. Then he quipped a quip he immediately wished he hadn't: "It is a bit of a club down there. The Democratic Party, all the candidates from Washington, they all know each other, they all move in the same circles, and what I'm doing is breaking into the country club." He winced and added, "That was an incredibly unfortunate phrase," then turned to an aide and asked, "Why do I *say* these things?"

Vermont's voters are familiar with Dean's occasional gaffes, and these mistakes rarely hurt him while he was governor. Indeed, he remains popular in the state. While in Vermont last August, I attended one of the Dean meetups, which are held the first Wednesday of every month. In the town of Randolph, an hour southeast of Burlington, I found my way to an echt-Vermont white clapboard country inn, where, in a back room, a few dozen Dean partisans were about to convene and write letters to out-of-state voters. I happened to be seated next to Norman Runnion, a retired newspaper editor, who told me that, during his days at the Brattleboro *Reformer,* "Howard and I tangled quite a bit." But Dean's recent performance—the shooting-from-the-mouth miscues included—had endeared him to Runnion. "What we're witnessing is Howard being Howard," he said. "He is not shy. He says what he thinks. That's why he kept getting reëlected." For Runnion, Dean's appeal transcended ideology. "This is the first outright conservative I've ever supported," he said, chuckling.

When I talked to Vermonters who knew Dean well, they spoke not only of his candor but also of his hands-on approach to public service. Rick Sharp, an environmental lawyer, told me about how he was enlisted by Dean in 1980, before his political career began, to help start the Citizens' Waterfront Group. Their initiative, which faced powerful opposition from real-estate developers and, at times, from Burlington's political leadership, ultimately resulted in a nine-mile bicycle path along Lake Champlain, permanent public access to the entire waterfront, and twenty acres of new parkland. Dean gave rallying speeches to supporters, but he also participated in volunteer drudgery. "He collected petition signatures when we were trying to put a bond issue on the ballot," Sharp recalled. "He went door-to-door with brochures. He helped pull up old railroad ties, which we were using to renew an area that had been a hangout for derelicts." And when Dean entered politics he didn't forget about the project. "When he got to the legislature," Sharp said, "he passed a law that preceded a U.S. Supreme Court ruling about converting old railroad rights-of-way to public trails." One of his last acts as governor, in December, 2002, was to persuade the legislature to appropriate $1.25 million to extend the bike path.

For all the hours Dean has spent with men like Sharp, he evidently developed few intimate friendships in Vermont. I had heard that Bill Sorrell, the state attorney general, whose mother, Esther, was an early political mentor of Dean's (beginning with the 1980 Carter campaign), was a close confidant of the candidate. Yet he told me that he "virtually never" socialized with Dean. "Howard and Judy are not people who go out to dinner, go to charitable balls or functions," Sorrell said. "If Howard was giving a speech on a Saturday night in the southern part of the state, he'd try to speak before dinner and get home by eight-thirty or nine o'clock." When people did see Dean socially, Sorrell added, it was almost always at events for their children—like hockey games.

It took me a while to find someone who could cite a just-for-fun social encounter with Howard Dean. This was Dave Wolk, a former legislator and now the president of Castleton State College—Dean's "closest friend" in Vermont, I was informed by several sources. "I met him when he was lieutenant governor and I was running for the state senate," Wolk told me. "We just hit it off, started doing stuff with our kids. Found out we had similar values, got to know each other as families. Judy has told me, 'You're one of the only ones who will tell him what he doesn't want to hear.' " What, in Wolk's estimation, was Dean's defining trait? "His competitiveness, by far," he said. "One time we're out with the kids sledding, in Chittenden, Vermont. This is the early nineties; the kids are all still little. We're on toboggans, a very long descent, about a mile. It turns into a race. At first, he acts like he doesn't care. Then we're racing, really racing. We're supposed to be just out playing with our kids, right? We get to the bottom. He says, 'You're so fucking competitive I can't believe it.' But he was the one. He's tough, he's hard-nosed. I've lost elections. Howard never has. I seriously doubt he even imagines what losing feels like."

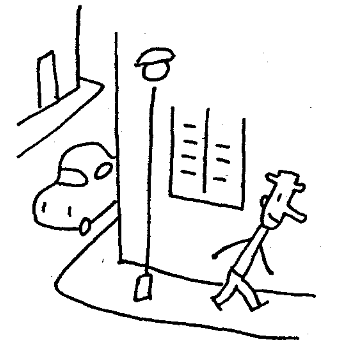
In 1994 and 1996, Dean served as chairman of the National Governors Association and the Democratic Governors' Association, respectively. The latter job involved a lot of travel around the country to recruit potential gubernatorial candidates, and Dean occasionally invited along Bob Rogan, his deputy chief of staff (currently his deputy campaign manager). During their jaunts in the summer of 1997, Rogan noticed that Dean's in-flight reading material had begun to include *Foreign Affairs*. Given the unlikelihood of a border war erupting between Vermont and Quebec, Rogan inferred, correctly, that Dean was contemplating running for President in 2000. A few months later, Dean raised the possibility during one of his weekly press conferences, and he soon regretted it. In early December, after reporters brought up the question once too often, he said sharply, "I'm not going to play the game anymore"—end of discussion, end of press conference.

Coincidentally, Dean had business in Washington the next day, as well as an appointment with Vice-President Al Gore, who, it was generally understood, was already in the race. Dean has never publicly revealed details of that conversation, but he must have said something that Gore found sufficiently tactless or presumptuous to cause him to reach for his flyswatter. Not long after he departed, someone in Gore's office leaked to the press that Dean had told the Vice-President he was "pushing ahead" with his own candidacy. Caught off guard, Dean responded, "As far as I'm concerned, this is political silliness." More than anything, it was political embarrassment; within weeks, his approval ratings in Vermont dropped twenty points. His trial balloon deflated.

This fall, when I asked Dean whether he felt that he'd been sandbagged by Gore, he said, "I'm not going there. I have a great relationship with Al Gore. My attitude is that's all something that happened a long time ago."

Dean wasn't kidding; for several months, "under the radar," as the *Times* would later note in a headline, he had been diligently cultivating Gore. In letters and phone conversations, he had praised the former Vice-President for his outspoken opposition to the Iraq war and his criticism of the Bush Administration's antiterrorism policies; had solicited his advice about campaign strategy; had visited him in Tennessee for a more drawn-out philosophical dialogue. The payoff came in December, when—in what seemed a seismic moment in the race for the nomination—Gore, with great fanfare, endorsed Dean. The case could be made, of course, that Dean had a larger reason to feel gratitude toward Gore, whose ponderous performance in the 2000 election had kindled a restiveness within the Democratic Party which he had astutely exploited.

I had raised the Gore-sandbagging question as I flew with Dean, in mid-October, from Detroit to Baltimore. We spoke on a Saturday; Dean had spent the morning in Des Moines, then flown to Michigan, where he had given a post-lunch speech to three hundred people at an Arab American Institute conference in Dearborn. (He had assured the audience that his fundamental message—"Only an American President can bring peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians"—was identical to one he had delivered the previous day to a Jewish gathering.) Awaiting him in Baltimore was a closed-door encounter with leaders of the politically active and dexterous Service Employees International Union, whose endorsement he was pursuing—an indispensable component of his strategy for stealing the Iowa caucuses from Dick Gephardt (who, until Dean got busy, was organized labor's favorite horse).



I had also spoken with Dean during the Sleepless Tour; one night, after a rally in Seattle, he took a seat next to me at a dinner. There were a half-dozen other reporters at the table, and the press handlers pulled over several more. Dean's demeanor on both occasions was unaffected, self-deprecatory here and there, but mainly self-assured, with no strained attempts to charm or humor. The leavening agent in his diction is his brisk, beyond-the-Beltway jargon-free style—no throat-clearing, no "Yes-well-now-let-me-say-this-about-that." However, what comes through when he gets drawn into discussions about his thought processes is evidence of a habit of mind that might serve him less well as the Presidential race unfolds.

In Seattle, Dean allowed that he'd been "absolutely stunned" by the "intensity" of the crowd at his rally. "When you started, did you envision a day like this?" someone asked, and Dean replied, "Absolutely not. No, never. I mean, I really didn't think that far ahead. I thought, maybe if we got the nomination, there would be some times like this."

He made a similar comment on the plane, when I pointed out that less than a year earlier he had still been his own campaign manager.

"True," he said.

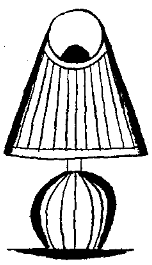
"You must have had some broad clarity about how you could make this whole thing happen," I suggested.

He laughed and said, "I actually had very little. I didn't know it was going to turn out like this. I had some vague notion that we were going to come from behind in New Hampshire, that kind of thing. Clearly, we had no idea what we were doing. It was just two or three of us who had never run a national campaign before or been in a national campaign before."

I switched topics, to Dean's support for the death penalty—an anomaly for a "social progressive" (though Bill Clinton was also a death-penalty advocate), and a curiosity because Vermont has no death penalty; nor was it a significant issue during the Dean years.

"That's a typical Howard Dean story,"

he said, recalling that capital punishment "somehow came up" during a press conference. "And I said I was thinking about changing my position. Because I was really, really stricken by the Polly Klaas case. I kept her picture on my desk the whole time I was governor. It really got to me. Partly because I had a daughter of my own, partly because I couldn't imagine the pain." The view out the window was of cloud cover over Somewhere, Pennsylvania. Dean was looking straight ahead. "So I mused that I was thinking of changing my position on the death penalty. So, every week the press asked me, every week they brought it up, every week they'd go on about it and ask, 'So have you changed your position yet? What do you think?' So, finally I started giving it some serious thought."



"Why do you call it a typical Howard Dean story?" I asked.

"Because it was not unusual for me to make policy at a press conference without having consulted my staff first," he said. "The rush for the door from the press conference—they'd call up all the cabinet officers and say, 'Here's what he said at the press conference.' And the staff would say, 'Oh, my God.' What they didn't understand is that I'd thought about the issue for weeks."

"What happens is I muse over stuff. The warning period is when I start talking about it, because then you've got about forty-eight hours. If I say I'd like some information on X or I think we ought to do something about Y, the staff's basically got about twenty-four to forty-eight hours before I figure it out and lay it out without their help. But it doesn't mean I haven't thought about it. My usual thing is I think about it for a long time. I turn it over and I turn it over.

"My roommates in college were always amazed that I could sit down and write a ten-page paper in twenty-four hours. I'd get the books one day and I'd write it that night. Ten pages. It wasn't because I was really doing that. What I was really doing was thinking about it for three weeks. Turning it over, thinking about it in my sleep, outlining it in my head, figuring out what I wanted to do. And then, once it's ready—*boom!*—you can't stop it from coming. That's why I get in trouble with my tongue. Because once I'm pretty sure I know what I want to do I lay it out. I do have to watch what I say. I do sometimes speak before I should. And one of the things I've learned in this campaign is you've got to allow more of a delay than twenty-four or forty-eight hours. That's principally because of what the press will do with it at the national level, not because it comes out any worse. The problem I have is not so much that I've got to watch what I say because I haven't thought stuff out. Most of the time I do—sometimes I don't, but most of the time I do. It's saying things that are too candid. It's characterizing things in very blunt language. That has always been something the press and insiders get upset about. But the public likes it a lot. I'm not doing it because the public likes it. I do it because that's who I am."

Even before Dean secured Gore's endorsement, the verdict, in many quarters, was that he had a lock on the nomination. A mid-November headline in *Roll Call*, the insider publication of Capitol Hill, proclaimed, "IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER, BUT IT'S PROBABLY OVER." The Iowa caucuses take place on January 19th, and the New Hampshire primary eight days later. If Dean wins both, as most polls predict, the campaigns of Kerry, Lieberman, and Gephardt will almost certainly be doomed. Only Clark and Edwards will then stand a chance of catching him.

Can Dean, notwithstanding an improving economy and an incarcerated Saddam, defeat Bush? His self-confidence and intense energy will no doubt serve him well in a head-to-head. But there remains something unsettling about his improvisatory, reactive decision-making style—his inclination to act in the moment without necessarily anticipating the relevant future. It is Dean's peculiar hybrid of a "vision problem." As governor, he did have specific policy goals, and he labored diligently to achieve them: health care, land conservation, child welfare. His other conspicuous accomplishments (budget balancing, civil unions, education-funding reform) were, in a sense, ad-hoc exertions. That doesn't make them less impressive—just not necessarily deeds from which one can construct grand extrapolations.

It's not Dean's fault that Vermont is the state he happened to be governor of, but in the context of a Presidential campaign his is a limited résumé. George Bush had even less to brag about in 2000—under the Texas constitution, a governor's power is distinctly circumscribed—but he enjoyed a reputation as a bipartisan coalition builder (since forsaken) and, more important, he had the gray-eminence family retainers whispering in his ear. Bill Clinton didn't wind up in the White House on the basis of his splendid performance in Arkansas; rather, he persuaded voters that he possessed a Big Plan—a new way of framing Democratic politics, one that embraced free trade as well as socially progressive policies like the Family and Medical Leave Act. (He was also helped by a recession and by Ross Perot's weird candidacy.)

Surely Dean has understood all along that not only is he running against Kerry, Edwards, and the rest of the pack (not to mention the incumbent) but boxing with Clinton's shadow. Within the Democratic base, the exasperation with Clinton for his character defects has paled when measured against the profound antipathy for Bush. What redeemed Clinton was not his personality but the breadth of his intellect; he had a carefully considered position on everything, a transformative vision. Years before he looked a New Hampshire voter in the eye, he'd been thinking systematically about how to rescue Democrats from the age of Big Government and special-interest pandering—and how to synchronize his philosophy and ambition with the imperatives of political life. He was a New Democrat in a very self-conscious way. What's more, he made sure that even as he was fixing problems in Arkansas he was educating himself about global issues, preparing himself for his larger objective. He did not wait until he was in his forties and then devote himself to catch-up readings of *Foreign Affairs* in airports.

Dean's novelty, by contrast, has been largely determined by adventitious circumstance (above all, an organizational infrastructure that he never imagined) and style—his verbal manner, his protestations of his un-Washington otherness—not policy substance. For all the Dean-bashing that has occurred during the Democratic debates, on the issues per se—apart from the (admittedly large) question of the Iraq-invasion vote and a few too-subtle-for-most-voters-to-grasp disagreements about trade policy and how to pay for health care and how far to roll back the Bush tax cuts—there is not a great deal that distinguishes Dean from his bashers.

But it's worth asking what's wrong with being reactive and improvisatory rather than implacably ideological. What one person might call policy flip-flops someone else might perceive as evidence of an open, educable mind. In a tumultuous time—one of real terror and brilliant fearmongering—such flexibility might ultimately be the wisest and most rational predisposition, as well as the most effective. After the capture of Saddam Hussein, George Bush made clearer than ever his Manichaean-messianic world view: "I believe . . . I truly believe . . . that freedom is the Almighty's gift to every person—every man and woman who lives in this world. That's what I believe. And the arrest of Saddam Hussein changed the equation in Iraq. Justice was being delivered to a man who defied that gift from the Almighty to the people of Iraq." Which was to say that the formalities and codified procedures of the new Iraq's criminal-justice system might be all well and good, but Old Testament justice, through the agency of an American-prosecuted preëmptive war, was far more satisfying.

By chance, Dean was scheduled to give a foreign-policy speech in Los Angeles two days after Saddam was yanked from his spider hole near Tikrit. "The capture of Saddam Hussein is good news for the Iraqi people and the world," he said. Nevertheless, he added, "Let me be clear: my position on the war has not changed. The difficulties and tragedies we have faced in Iraq show that the Administration launched the war in the wrong way, at the wrong time, with inadequate planning, insufficient help, and at unbelievable cost. An administration prepared to work with others in true partnership might have been able, if it found no alternative to Saddam's ouster, to then rebuild Iraq with far less cost and risk."

One had to read the complete text to discern that few of Dean's foreign-policy prescriptions differed much from ideas enunciated by the first President Bush: multilateralism rather than unilateralism; a commitment, when necessary, to "call on the most powerful armed forces the world has ever known to ensure the security of this nation." It was not a bold, doctrinaire overview but a promise of what might be called pragmatic idealism—a commitment to "the credibility that comes from telling the truth; the knowledge that comes from first-rate intelligence, undiluted by ideology; the strength that comes from robust alliances and vigorous diplomacy."

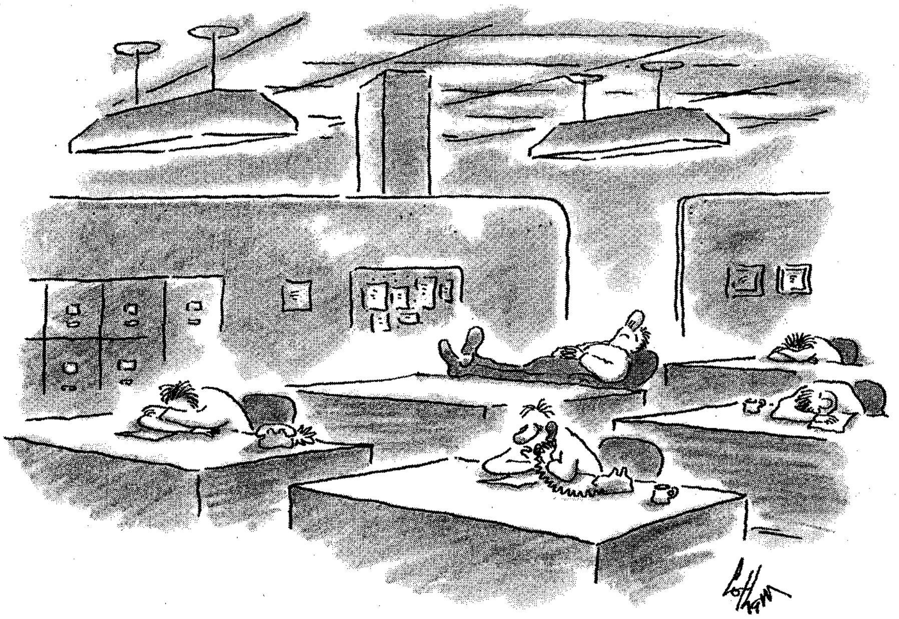
Dean's speech, and his evolving foreign-policy thinking, was the product of his consultations with advisers who were largely veterans of the Clinton Administration. One of them, Anthony Lake, Clinton's first national-security adviser, told the Washington *Post*, just before Saddam's arrest was announced, "One of the attractive things about [Dean]—though it is also slightly worrisome—is that it is very hard to characterize him." The virtue of this, Lake added, was that "a more doctrinaire approach leads to error."

The prospect of a Dean Doctrine being delineated over the next few months—something reducible to a phrase as stark as Bush's "axis of evil"—seems remote. In all likelihood, in a Dean-versus-Bush general election campaign, we would witness a tension between Dean's inherent nature—a man accustomed to adaptive approaches to complex problems—and the exigencies, as a representative of all wings of the Democratic Party, of actually getting elected. It's not clear that Dean could get by on nimbleness alone; even Clinton, the most charismatic and quick-witted of politicians, needed the allure of the New Democrat to win the White House.

Last summer, Joe Trippi told *U.S. News & World Report* that he had given Dean a curious piece of advice: "I tell him the only way he can win is to believe in his heart he cannot win. We've got to act like we have nothing to lose." That, as they say, was then. When I asked Dean, in mid-October, whether he still subscribed to the Trippi wisdom, he replied, "In part. I think the problem with the Democratic Party in general is that they've been so afraid to lose they're willing to say whatever it takes it to win. And once you're willing to say whatever it takes to win, you lose—because the American people are much smarter than folks in Washington think they are. Do I still believe it? I think you have to be ready to move forward and not just try to hold on to what you've got. I truly believe that if you're not moving forward you're moving backwards in life. There's no such thing as neutral."

"So, then you have to envision yourself losing as well."

"I never do that," he said, shaking his head. "What's the point? If you lose, you've got a whole new set of things to worry about. I'm not going to think about it in advance. I actually usually don't envision myself losing or winning. I just envision the next step." ♦



"Will it be necessary to wake the others?"

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

BAGS IN TREES: A RETROSPECTIVE

BY IAN FRAZIER

For more than ten years now, I've been tangled up with the problem of plastic bags stuck in trees. If I've learned anything from the experience, it's "Be careful what you notice." I was living in Brooklyn; I noticed the many plastic bags flapping by their handles from the high branches of trees, cheerful and confident and out of reach. Noticing led to pondering, pondering led to an invention: the bag snagger, a prong-and-hook device that, when attached to a long pole, removes bags and other debris from trees with satisfying efficiency. My friend Tim McClelland made the first working model in his jewelry studio on Broome Street, downtown. Possessing the tool, we of course had to use it; we immediately set off on a sort of harvest festival of bag snagging.

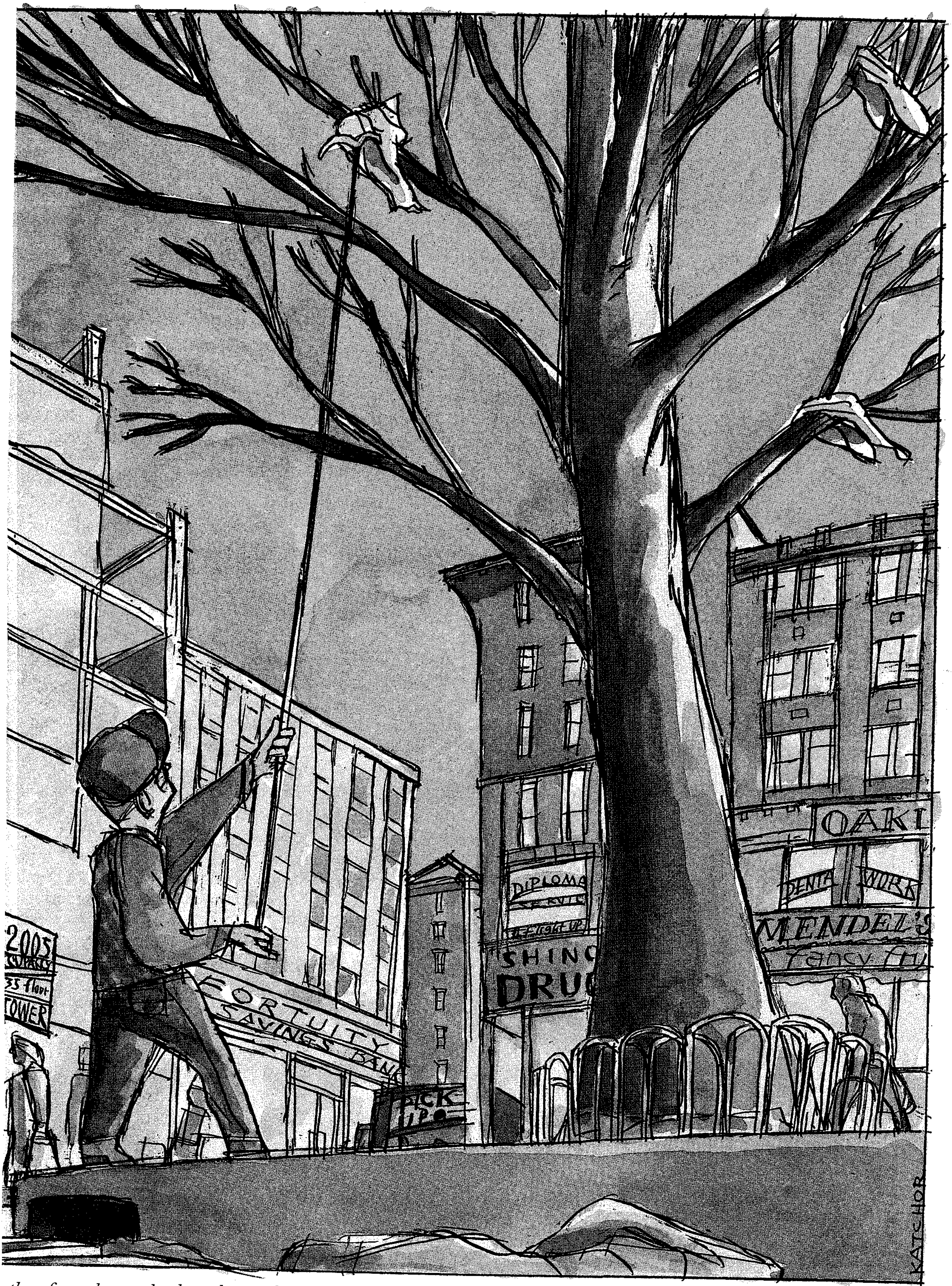
Tim's older brother, Bill, came, too. With snagger and poles (interlocking ones, of aluminum, at first) stowed in Bill's Taurus, we snagged in every New York borough, sometimes going out twice a week. We found bags everywhere, by the thousand; the ultrafine traffic soot that collects on them covered our hands like graphite. Then our ambition led us further, on bag-snagging jaunts to Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Jersey. From someone at a party I heard that trees along the Mississippi River were full of debris after the big floods of 1993, so one August we drove to the river and did a lot of snagging on both the Illinois and the Missouri sides. An environmental group invited us to come to Los Angeles and help with a cleanup along the Los Angeles River, so Bill and I flew out and snagged bags and debris from the prickly desert flora there. For a long while, bag snagging became our main outdoor recreation, completely obliterating the occasional mornings we'd formerly given to golf.

BEN KATCHOR

Bill and Tim and I are all transplanted Midwesterners. They grew up in Michigan, I in Ohio. Bill went to my high school in Ohio. We used to do some wild things. Get Tim to tell you about the time at his parents' house outside Rochester, Michigan, on New Year's Eve when he and I decided it would be a great idea to shoot a flashlight out of a tree from a moving toboggan. We tied the flashlight to a branch above a toboggan run on their property, and we were sitting on the toboggan, Tim in front, me in back, me with a loaded shotgun, both of us scooching with our heels to get the toboggan started, when Bill and his (now) wife, Jean, intervened.

Or another time, this one in my loft in lower Manhattan: Tim and I were sitting around drinking Jack Daniel's and beer, and we took my twenty-gauge shotgun down and started fooling with it. Tim asked if I had any ammo for it, and I said I did, and I went and got it. He asked how you loaded it, and I chambered a shell. It happened that my girlfriend (now wife) had moved out a few weeks earlier. Not long before she left, she had persuaded me, at the cost of much labor and hauling by ropes up the elevator shaft, to add a heavy oak bookshelf to our few loft furnishings. I had never figured out where to put the bookshelf, and it still stood in the middle of the floor at one end of the loft, about forty feet from where Tim and I were sitting. The bookshelf had a back of particle board. Hefting the gun, I looked at the shelf for a while, and listened to determine if my neighbors upstairs and down were home; the floor and ceiling in that loft were thin enough so that I could usually hear my neighbors moving around. Nobody home, I decided. I stood, aimed at the bookshelf, and fired. The sound of a shotgun in a brick-walled, enclosed space like that is indescribably loud. There was also the skittery sound of the bird-shot pellets going across

A lot of what ends up in Manhattan's trees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Fancy
KATCHOR

them from above or has been thrown down into them. People get mad and chuck other people's stuff out the window.

the floor on the other side of the big hole they blew in the particle board. I don't think Tim or I had ever laughed that hard.

Blue gunsmoke filled the room. I gave the gun to Tim, and he aimed and pulled the trigger. We laughed even harder at this explosion, because now we knew better what to expect. I took the gun and fired again. A thick fog of gunsmoke hung everywhere. Just then the buzzer rang. It was Bill and two friends. They came in, saw the gunsmoke, saw the empty bottle and beer cans on the floor, saw the spent shells, and heard us babbling. They began to back out the door. Amazingly, though, we were able to persuade them that taking a shot would be really fun, and eventually all three of them (one a pacifist woman nurse) did.

Maybe because we grew up surrounded by space and horizons and long views, we Midwesterners felt confined in the city, or constrained. Sometimes we talked about how cool it would be to see a cargo plane at ten thousand feet drop dozens of yellow Checker cabs over an empty area like the Sheep Meadow in Central Park, and how the taxis would look falling into the city against the blue of the sky; or how cool it would be to get a bucket of golf balls and hit them, one after the next, up Fifth Avenue some deserted Sunday morning. That last fantasy we partially enacted, buying range balls by the gross and hitting them into the East and Hudson Rivers from the lower-Manhattan shoreline. Stroking a long, soaring drive and bouncing it off a support beam of the Manhattan Bridge gave a deeply pleasurable sensation that began in the shoulders and spread down the spine to the toes.

For us, bag snagging represented a more socialized form of the fun we'd been having, or imagining, before. Snagging gave the thrill of vandalism, yet was its opposite—mischievous good, rather than mischievous bad. During our bag-snagging foray along the Mississippi, a woman photographer who accompanied us (I was writing about the adventure for *Outside* magazine) looked at us in puzzlement, trying to get a grasp on our hard-to-explain hobby. Then she asked, "Is this bag snagging part of a twelve-step program, or something, that you guys are involved in?" The question made us stop for a moment. She wasn't right, yet her intuition hadn't been entirely wrong.

It goes without saying that the city was different then. Lower Manhattan, with its tendency to depopulate on weekends, was our favorite bagging ground; we used to take stuff out of trees in public spaces that are closely patrolled or completely fenced off (or nonexistent) now. We even had our own traffic cone, with which we redirected traffic when we wanted to work on a branch overhanging the street. Once or twice, we walked unauthorized and unescorted through private buildings to get to a high entanglement that could be reached only from an inner courtyard. People assumed we had some kind of official status, when in fact we had no status at all.

Only once were we seriously challenged. Tim and I had spent a Saturday afternoon among the London plane trees in the lawn around City Hall, experimenting with the aluminum poles at the greatest extension we had yet tried, forty-five or fifty feet. At that length, the pole tends to bend not just over but back again, in a noodly sine curve that makes it difficult to control. As we were trying to master it, a white Parks Department pickup jerked to a stop on a nearby piece of pavement, and a fierce, burly Parks Department guy named Dave Miller hopped out. He asked us what we were doing, and when we tried to explain cut us off with the information that we were breaking the law and that if we injured the trees we could be fined or jailed.

Again we explained, and a grudging curiosity got the better of him. High in one of the plane trees nearby, beyond the reach of anything but a cherry picker, a large plastic drop cloth had wrapped itself around a crotch of boughs. Rashly, we offered to take it out while he observed. We had never before snagged anything that high. Dave Miller hesitated, then gave his permission and stood back, arms folded, a scowl on his heavy brow. Tim tried for a while and budged the drop cloth without freeing it. My heart was pounding as if we were auditioning on Broadway. As I watched, I realized that the plastic was in a simple knot that it could be backed out of. I took over, put the wobbly pole on the target, pushed and turned the plastic, unknotted it from the tree crotch, and lowered it to the lawn on the end of the pole like a captured standard. Dave Miller all but leaped for joy. He had a passerby photograph him with us, the pole, and the drop cloth, he shook our hands twice, and on the spot he issued us official Parks Department volunteer cards.

Eventually, we removed drop cloths by the dozen. In Manhattan, they are a common kind of high-branch entanglement. They fall into trees from skyscrapers under construction and other upper-story sites. Tarps, also—you get a lot of them, especially around bridges. From two trees under the Williamsburg Bridge Bill and Tim removed an immense blue canvas tarp complete with grommets. Evidently it had blown off the back of a truck and landed on the trees, smothering and oppressing them like an incubus. In fact, a lot of what ends up in Manhattan's trees falls into them or is thrown. People get mad and chuck other people's stuff out the window. Sometimes as we removed a series of objects—Walkman, T-shirt, sneakers, underpants, pajama bottoms—we understood that they had all once been the possessions of the same unfortunate guy.

Of course, the basic thing that gets in a New York City tree is the white plastic deli bag. It reaches the tree with the aid of the wind, or (as I sometimes think) by its own power. With its filmy whiteness and its two looped handles, it suggests a self-levitating undershirt; we have named it the undershirt bag. It does not have a soul, but it imitates one, rising and floating on the exhalations of a subway grate like the disembodied spirits that poets used to converse with in Hell. Its prehensile handles cling to any branch that comes within range, and then grab hold for eternity. This bag is not hard to get out of a tree when it's still fresh, but as it ages and shreds

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it becomes more difficult. The plastic dry-cleaning bag is its sinister companion. After only a day or two of wind-shredding, the micron-thick plastic of a dry-cleaning bag is all but unremovable. Almost as common as either of those are audiotape and videotape. We have removed furlongs of both, and Bill (who's a composer) has carefully spliced some of the fragments piece to piece; the result, when played, resembles a door suddenly opened on a hall of howling, tedious demons.

If you spend a lot of time taking bags out of trees, you learn that they don't wish anybody well. It's no accident that a visual convention for spookiness is dangling spiderwebs, moss-draped branches, jungly, heart-of-darkness drooping vines. Though not the Dark Power itself, bags in trees nonetheless act as its minions; or, to put it another way, nothing makes a neighborhood look scarier than bare-branch trees draped with plastic-bag shreds above a razor-wire fence similarly fluttering and bestrewn. The bags and debris are an established part of the picture. They like it up there, and prefer not to be disturbed.

Once, at a pedestrian mall between Roosevelt Avenue and Union Street in Queens, Tim and I were taking detritus out of some young linden trees growing in pots. The trees had been afflicted, years before, with a bondage of little holiday lights in strings. The lights had long ago quit working, and had been abandoned rather than taken down. We were pretty sure they had no current anymore, but getting electrocuted via our aluminum poles was still a concern. I began on one tree and Tim on another, twenty yards or so away.

I noticed a dirty blue bath towel hanging between some branches. It seemed to bulge a bit; I figured it was full of water, as is a lot of trash in trees. With the hook of the snagger, I cut the bulge to drain it. Instantly a large rat sprang from the hole I'd made and shot down the pole at me. I remember seeing its teeth. It moved so fast it would have reached my hands before I let go the pole, but at the last split second it leaped from the pole to another tree, scrabbled swiftly up, leaped to the roof of a building, and disappeared.

Even onlooking pigeons sometimes got upset with us, and wanted us to leave well enough alone. As we wielded our pole, they would fly at us with keening, gurgling cries. In Collect Pond Park, on Centre Street downtown, we were trying to remove a pigeon that had caught its foot in a piece of party balloon wrapped around a high branch—that ribbon is like wire, and the pigeon, unable to free itself, had died—and as we were maneuvering the pole closer suddenly all the park's many pigeons began swooping near the corpse protectively and diving toward our heads. Soon a riot of pigeons filled the high, narrow shaft formed by the gloomy government buildings looming around. We ended up leaving the body where it was.

Among the city's human occupants, a few seemed to like what we were doing. Now and then, windows in an apartment building overlooking a tree we were de-bagging would go up, and a resident would lean out and applaud. A nice elderly lady might call down and invite us in for a tuna sandwich and a glass of grape juice; an old man once thanked me and gave me a dollar. Or else people said things to us like "Thank God the city is finally doing something about this problem." Other observers, naturally, heckled us and told us we were idiots. By the Walt Whitman housing projects, in Brooklyn, someone dropped a forty-ounce beer bottle from an upper window to a point on the lawn uncomfortably near us. When I tried to describe bag snagging to some black and Latino students in a class I visited at Kingsborough Community College, a lot of them were offended that anyone could devote time to an activity so (to them) pointless and unnecessary.

At home, the reaction of our wives to our newfound pastime was what Alice Kramden's would have been to a similar scheme of Ralph's. This reaction grew more pronounced during the period when some of the objects we removed from trees seemed so interesting to us that we began bringing them home. I got a sense of the opinion of wives in general one afternoon when I'd spent the day indoors with domestic duties and took a break by doing some snagging on my own in Prospect Park and vicinity. When I came back, our downstairs neighbor, Chris Avanzino, happened to be standing on the stoop, her baby on her hip. She looked me over and said, "Your wife is in there taking care of your two-year-old kid with a hundred-and-two-degree temperature and you're walking around the neighborhood with a *pole* taking bags

JAMES F. BELL

"My client got twenty years, yet he paid me in full. It just shows the system works."

out of *trees*. . . ." She shook her head and gave me a pitying, soul-withering smile.

Our pursuit of bag snagging led down various paths—for example, into the obscurities of patent law. Tim and I thought our snagger might be patentable, because probably no device like it had ever existed before. Our first patent attorney, a calm, bald man named Charlie Blank, said he thought our chances of getting a patent were good. Then he retired. Another attorney at Charlie Blank's firm took over our application, and a year or two later told us that the Patent and Trademark Office had rejected it because a fruit picker patented in 1869 duplicated our snagger's function—something to do with a similar hook on the end of the fruit picker. Our attorney appealed the decision, on the ground that the fruit picker would not work as effectively on plastic bags, which in any event did not exist back in 1869. This time, the patent office agreed and issued us U.S. Patent No. 5,566,538. The *Times* selected our snagger for mention in its weekly "Patents" column, along with a surgical tool that uses a tiny beam of water moving at supersonic speed to cut human eye tissue. We were delighted to get the patent—it's like a small asterisk of immortality.

Partly because of the patent, and through a set of other circumstances too complicated to go into, I appeared in a movie, "Blue in the Face" (Miramax, 1995, starring Harvey Keitel), in a cameo role as myself talking about bags in trees. The movie did not do very well. In the art theatre where I saw it, I was the only person in the audience. The host of a radio show in New York happened to see the movie, however, and he asked Bill and Tim and me to be on his show. The husband of Bette Midler, the singer and movie star, heard the broadcast and afterward called the radio station and asked if we would sell him a bag snagger as a birthday present for his wife. Bette Midler, as people know, is an enemy of litter, and she shares our opinion of bags in trees. Bette Midler liked the snagger her husband gave her and eventually she bought more of them for the cleanup crew she sponsors in the city, and the hardworking kids who staff it began to make a real dent in uptown bags in trees.

With the hope of selling a lot more bag snaggers we formed a company, Bag Snaggers, Inc. A man in California who has a small business manufacturing and selling specialty poles—tree-pruning poles, snake-lassoing poles, monkey-catching poles for use in airplane cargo hangars when monkeys escape from shipping crates and climb up into the rafters—agreed to manufacture our snagger and interlocking fibreglass poles to go with it. We listed ourselves in some public-works Web sites and catalogues, and sold a few sets to civic groups and municipalities. Bill, who handled the paperwork, began referring to Bag Snaggers, Inc., as a "multi-hundred-dollar company." But, over time, our sales were not brisk. The park employees and groundskeepers of America evidently are not keen on shelling out for a tool that will involve them in new duties wrangling debris out of trees. Recently, Bill and Tim and I have been talking about dissolving the company and shutting operations down.

The truth is, these days we don't go bag snagging as much as we used to. None of us live in the city anymore; Tim moved his jewelry business to Great Barrington, Massachusetts, I moved to Montana and then New Jersey, and Bill was in New Jersey all along. We have families, and the usual excess of more important obligations. A morning of bag snagging requires logistics and scheduling and phone calls. Plus, when we started doing this we were younger; reaching sixty feet of wobbly fibreglass into a tree and snagging a bag amid obstructing branches can be vexingly hard. We've begun to get bag-snagging injuries—shoulder, neck, back—and around the house the sympathy available for them is only the negative kind. We hoped that a new group of young guys would see the appeal of our tree-bag pursuit and take over, but so far that hasn't happened. Apparently, bag-snagging fever was specific just to us, and just to then.

Stuff having to do with bag snagging still comes up. People think of bags in trees, and they think of us. An aid worker just back from Africa tells us that there's a lot of debris in trees in the poorer parts of Africa, and the closer you get to the supposed epicenter of the AIDS epidemic the more of it there is. An Irishwoman says that in Ireland bags in trees are called "witches' knickers." A resident of the Upper East Side writes to tell us that ever since some balloons got stuck in a tree outside her bedroom window her family has had bad luck with health; she asks if we can take the balloons out, and one afternoon we do. We still accept special requests occasionally.

At a midtown cocktail party awhile ago, Thomas Mallon, the novelist, asked me if we still took bags out of trees. I said we did, and he said he had a related problem: helium-filled Mylar balloons that float to the ceiling of Grand Central Station and linger there for months. He asked if there was anything we could do about this. I said I would check it out.

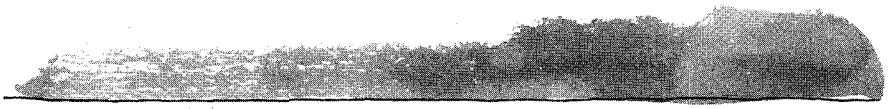
The next time I was in Grand Central, I saw what he meant. The vaulted ceiling of the main concourse rises a hundred feet or more above the station's marble floor. The height is lofty but still measurable in human terms—it's the heart-stopping altitude of the tightrope walker, the altitude of prophetic ascension and rocket liftoff. When visitors come into the station for the first time, their eyes go to the ceiling, and, in the vast interior space the ceiling encloses, their prospects seem to expand. Looking up in Grand Central evokes feelings of vertigo and excitement and fear-of-heights and dizziness and exaltation that may recall the reasons you moved to New York City in the first place. The ceiling is the dark greenish-blue of a clear summer-night sky, studded with small lights representing stars in the constellations of the zodiac, with the figures of the zodiac outlined in off-white around them. And there in the middle of the ceiling—in the constellation of Pisces—was a shiny, silver, heart-shaped Mylar balloon.

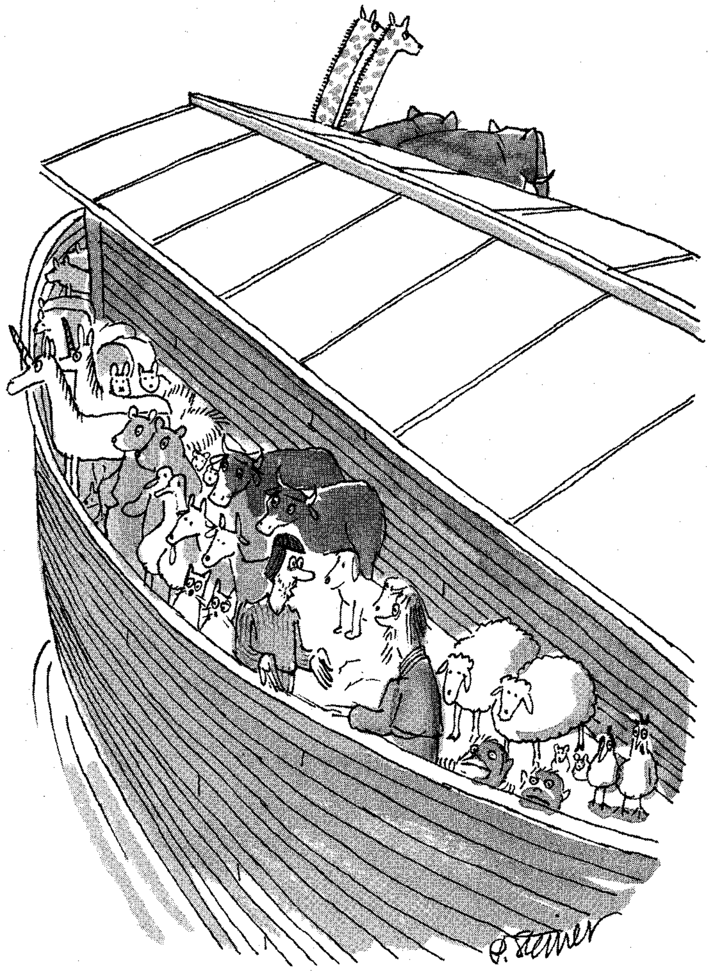
I came back week after week and kept tabs on it. It moved only slightly, between the ventral fins of one of Pisces's fish. Once, I was there in July and a tour guide leading a group said in annoyance that the balloon had been up there since Valentine's Day. A Metro-North worker standing by a track entrance said that tourists had just complained to him about the balloon ruining their photographs. By then, thousands or millions of Grand Central passersby must have seen it. In this most public of American public spaces, the balloon was unreachable, top-of-the-world, thumb-in-your-eye.

Obviously we could not get to it with bag-snagging poles. Even if we braced the poles with some kind of tripod, the ceiling is too high. From a guy who works for the Bryant Park conservancy, Bill heard that a cook from the Oyster Bar restaurant, on the lower level of the station, used to shoot balloons down at night with a BB gun when he got off work; but to me shooting seemed too much of a risk to the recently restored zodiac paintings, as well as not quite sporting, somehow. And then there are the Homeland Security soldiers who patrol the station with their M-16s . . .

So, we thought about it, and here's the idea: get three other helium balloons at a florist's or party store; cover the balloons with double-sided tape, judiciously, so as not to affect their buoyancy; tie the tape-covered balloons to stout monofilament line on a fishing rod; stand beneath the balloon lodged on the ceiling; send the retriever balloons aloft until they touch the other balloon; nudge them around until the tape adheres; then reel the retrievers and their tape-stuck captive back down.

Recently, Bill and I ran a field test of this idea under a tall highway bridge in the Jersey Meadowlands. First, we sent up a target balloon on a long lead. It came to a stop between two girders. Then we sent the retrievers. Despite a brisk wind (which, of course, would be absent in Grand Central), the retriever balloons reached the target balloon, nestled around it with a kind of natural gregariousness, stuck to it with the double-sided tape, and held it securely enough so that we could reel them and it down. Repeated tests achieved the same result. Man, the toolmaker: at our success the marshy New Jersey landscape stretched around us in submission, like background scenery in a portrait of Sir Isaac Newton. This idea can work, we are one hundred per cent sure. Whenever we get the go-ahead from the company that manages Grand Central, we're ready. ♦





"Bad news—the unicorns are gay."

FICTION

DAISY

BY CHANG-RAE LEE

The day that Daisy died was a lot like this one, early August, with the sun seemingly stuck right at the top of the sky, casting light and heat that made all the neighborhood kids vault over each other with glee and subdued everyone else, moms and dads and older folks and even the family pets. Daisy liked the heat, and though she didn't know how to swim, she'd spend plenty of time in our back-yard pool, tanning in her plaid one-piece in the floating lounger or else dog-paddling with an old-fashioned life preserver looped under her arms. I tried to teach her how to swim a couple of times, but I'd end up all scratched around the neck and shoulders, Daisy lurching and pulling on me whenever I let her go, yelling if her face or scalp got wet. She wasn't dainty or persnickety but for some reason she hated being submerged. She always showered with a cap and on alternate days shampooed her hair in the kitchen sink, the drain of which I'd have to unclog every couple of weeks, pulling out the thick black strands with a pair of chopsticks.

And I swear—I swear, I swear—that I never imagined for a second that the pool was dangerous, at least for her. Sure, I jumped in a half-dozen times to pluck out one of my kids or their mangy booger-streaked friends thrashing fitfully in the deep end, but Daisy was always careful and tentative; even after she started to change and began seeing our family doctor for meds, she entered the water as if it were as hot as soup, then pushed off from the steps with her float tube and kicked, her taut chin just above the surface.

"Hey, honey," she'd say to me, the ends of her hair slicked to pencil points. "I'm a mermaid."

"Sexier than that," I'd say, through the Sunday paper, through the summer haze.

It was nice like that, a lot of the time. I remember how Theresa and Jack would spend pretty much every second between breakfast and dinner in the pool, or running about on the concrete surround and the lawn spraying each other and whatever friends were around with water pistols filled with Hi-C punch, or sometimes even pee. (I caught them once in the rickety little cabana I'd built, giggling and pissing all over their hands.) If it was the weekend, I'd be out there for a good while, too. I'd chuck the kids around in the water and play the monster or the buffoon and do a belly flop or two for a finale, then dry off and wrap a towel around my waist and drag a chaise and a beer beneath the maples and doze until one of the kids got hurt or fell or puked after drinking too much pool water, all of which in the heat and brightness and clamor made for a mighty decent time. This was dependent, of course, on what mood Daisy was in, but in those early days she was pretty solid, she was pretty much herself, she was just like the girl I fell in love with.

In the afternoon, she would set up the patio table with all kinds of vittles—she'd have soppressata and sugar ham and a crock of port-wine cheese and Ritz and Triscuits, and she'd have plenty of carrot and celery sticks and pimiento olives—and then she'd bring out an electric fryer, a long contractor's extension cord snaking back through the kitchen window, to fry chicken wings or butterflied shrimp or French fries right there on the table, so the food was hot and fresh. If my folks or other people were going to be over, she'd put out her homemade eggrolls and some colorful seaweed-and-rice thing that we didn't yet know, back in 1975, was sushi, and which people in our part of Long Island couldn't believe she had made, along with spicy sweet ribs and a cold noodle dish whose Korean name she always told us but we could never remember, although everyone loved it and always finished it first. She had this way of arranging the food that made you think of formal gardens: everything was garnished with fans of sliced oranges or shrubs of kale or waterfowl she'd carved out of apples, giving them shiny red wings.

I was working a lot then, having just been made second-in-command at Battle Brothers Brick & Mortar, a masonry company started by my grandfather during the Depression which my father and uncles had transformed into a successful landscaping firm, and which I have maintained with much hard work, if little passion. I never had any love for brick and mortar, or for mulch and shrubs, and in those days I was mostly waiting around for my brother Bobby to return from Vietnam and take my place, which he never did.

Daisy was like a lot of the young mothers in the neighborhood, which meant that she took care of the house and the kids and the cooking and the bills and whatever else came up that I could have dealt with but didn't, for the usual semi-acceptable reasons of men; but Daisy didn't mind, that was never a problem between us, because when you got right down to it she was an old-fashioned girl in matters of family, and also because her nature (before she changed and ended up another person entirely) preferred order to everything else, and certainly didn't want any lame hand Jerry Battle could provide.

In fact, the first real signs of her troubles were the kinds of things you see in most people's houses—stuff like piles of folded laundry waiting to be put away, some dishes in the sink, toys loose underfoot—but for Daisy, when this began to happen, it meant there was a quiet disaster occurring, a cave-in somewhere deep in the core. One time, on a day just like this, kids frolicking about, our guests arrayed around the back yard and the spread of goodies on the patio table, Daisy suddenly unravelled. I don't know what happened exactly but one of the kids must have bumped the table where she was using the deep fryer, and hot oil lipped over the edge and splashed onto the table and then spilled down onto her sandalled foot. I knew something had happened because I saw her jump a little and leap back, and it occurred to me only later that she didn't shout or scream or make any sound at all. I went over to see if she was burned, but before I could get there Daisy did the oddest thing: she picked up the fryer by its handles, turned it over, and slammed it on the table, the oil and chicken wings spurting out sideways, luckily in nobody's direction. I yanked the extension cord off and asked her if she was all right, and she had a sickened look on her face and she said that it was an accident and she was sorry. By this time our guests had crowded around. I'm sure no one saw what had really happened, since everyone was appropriately concerned, but I knew and I got angry (if only because I was confused and a little scared) and yelled at her to be more careful. She started crying and

JOSHUA LUTZ/REDUX/COURTESY GITTERMAN GALLERY

that brought an end to the afternoon, most of our guests deciding to leave, among them some neighbors, who never called us again.

Of course, somewhere not so deep down, none of what happened that afternoon was a surprise to me. From the moment I met Daisy, on the main floor of Gimbels in New York, where she was offering sample sprays of men's cologne (I think it was Pierre Cardin, a huge phallic bottle of which I bought that day and may still have in the bottom of the bathroom vanity), I knew she was volatile. At Gimbels, Daisy sprayed me before I consented and then sprayed me again, and I would have been really annoyed except that she was amazingly bright-eyed and pretty and she had these perfect little hands, with which she smoothed down my coat collar. She'd been in the country for only a few months, attending Hunter College to study art history. She had a heavy accent to her English, but she wasn't a tentative talker. She let her talk spill out in a messy exuberant froth, the effect instantly inundating and certainly charming and not at all unsexy. I asked her if she would take a walk with me and she left her post without a word to anyone and we ended up lunching at the H. & H. automat, where I had an egg-salad sandwich and she got the Salisbury-steak meal with mashed potatoes and gravy, plus side dishes of cut corn and green beans and for dessert a slice of both German chocolate cake and cherry pie. She bolted all of it down as if she were some war refugee, but she was perfectly neat and systematic in doing so—every square of steak was larded with mashed potato, every forkful of cake or pie topped with whipped cream, the gravy finally cleaned up with white bread and the syrupy cherry filling with her index finger, the last dredge of which she offered up and let me lick. I probably thought then that she was loony, but—surprise, surprise—I didn't care.

I had no idea what real craziness was. I thought people like my father and my little brother Bobby were off kilter and ego-active and maybe in need of professional help, but I didn't know what it meant to be D.S.M.-certified, described in the literature, perhaps totally nuts. Just before he went to Vietnam on his first and last tour, Bobby threw Ma and Pop a surprise wedding-anniversary party—their twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh, definitely not one of the big ones—spending every last dime he had made playing a couple of summers of minor-league baseball on a fifty-guest dinner in the city at a famous French restaurant with murals on the walls. Pop was so pleased when he arrived that he told the sommelier to bring out his best wine (which he'd always do at the Chianti Corner in Islip when entertaining a Battle Brothers customer), but a couple of cases of Château Incroyable later the bill had tripled. Bobby couldn't cover it. Luckily I was still carrying the day's receipts, and with a few last secreted bills from Ma we avoided any embarrassment, and all the while Pop and Bobby were toasting each other's good taste and fealty and love. For years Pop would say that Bobby should have met and married Daisy, that he would have been a better match for her than I. He was probably right, though I'm sure that, had Bobby ever returned from the war, Pop would have steered him to a reliable domestic model, some quiet local girl who wouldn't fire up the afterburners when she didn't need to.

A month or so after the deep-fryer incident, the first genuine trouble revealed itself. Daisy went off to Bloomingdale's and charged up seven thousand dollars on a leather living-room set and a full-length chinchilla coat. We had a terrific fight, me rabid with disbelief and Daisy defiant and bitter, talking about how she "knew class people" and mocking me for "working in dirt" like some peasant or field hand. Her eyes were wild and she was almost spitting with hatred.

In the previous days, she had bought herself and the kids several new outfits and served us filet mignon and lobsters and repainted our bedroom a deep Persian crimson. I didn't know then that these actions were indicative of a grandiose run-up to a truly alarming finale; in fact, I was pretty pleased, because Daisy seemed happy for the first time in a long time. She was lively with the kids and we were making love every night. I figured I was still way ahead of a lot of other guys with young families I knew, who were already playing the field and spending most of their free time away from the house. If Daisy hadn't blitzkrieged our net worth at Bloomingdale's nothing much would have changed; it's likely I wouldn't have cared if she were only steadily depleting our bank account, a time-honored activity in our civilized world. This was 1975, though, when the economy was basically shitting itself, and Jack and Theresa were seven and six and I was making twenty thousand dollars a year at Battle Brothers, which was a hell of a lot of money, actually, and much more than I deserved. But seven thousand dollars for anything was ruinous, so I had to beg the store manager to take everything back (with a ten-per-cent restocking fee, plus delivery), and then I cut up her charge cards and took away her bankbook and started giving her the minimum cash allowance for the week's groceries and gas.

As you can imagine, Daisy wasn't exactly pleased with the arrangement. It was a suggestion from Pop, whom I hadn't consulted directly but who had overheard my mother telling her sister what Daisy had done. The next day, Pop barrelled in to the messy office we shared at the shop and plunked his backside onto my desk blotter and asked me what the hell I was doing. I had no clue what he was talking about, and as usual in those days I stared up at him with my mouth half crooked, absently probing my upper molars with my tongue.

"I'm talking about Daisy," he growled, as if he were the one who had married her, as if he were the one having trouble. I should mention that Pop had always adored Daisy. From the second he met her it was clear—he could never stop talking about how gorgeous she was and how sexy, and whenever they met he'd corral her with a big hug and a kiss and then he'd twirl her in a little cha-cha move, all of which Daisy welcomed and played into as if she were Audrey Hepburn in "Roman Holiday," which was just the kind of humoring and ass-kissing that my father has always lived for and measured everyone by.

"I hear she went on a spree at the department store and damn near bankrupted you."

"Not near," I said. "It was seven grand."

"Holy Jesus."

"But it's fixed now. I made it go away."

"Damn it, Jerome, it's just going to happen again! Don't you know how to handle your wife yet?"

"I think I've learned something in these last eight years, yes."

"Bullshit. Listen to me. Are you listening, Jerome? This is what I'm telling you. You have to squash her every once in a while—I mean, completely flatten her. Otherwise a beautiful woman like Daisy gets big ideas, and those ideas get bigger every year. If she were a plain sedan like your mother you wouldn't have to worry, you've only got to deal with a certain displacement, you know what I mean? But with a sleek machine you've got to tool a governor onto the sucker, do something to cut her fuel."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Pop."

"What I'm saying is you've got to be a little brutal. Not always, just every once in a while. Now is a good time. All this women's libbing and bra burning is confusing everybody. Treat her badly, don't give her any money or attention or even a chance to bitch or argue. Don't let her leave the house for a week. Then when she's really down in the dumps bring her some diamond earrings or a tennis bracelet and take her out to a lobster dinner. After, screw her brains out, or whatever you can manage. Then everything will go back to normal, you'll see."

"And how do you know any of this works, if Ma isn't that kind of woman?"

"Trust your pop, Jerome. I have wide experience. And if that doesn't do it, call Dr. Derricone."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," I must have said, to get him off my desk and case. But that night when I got home Daisy was undertaking an overhaul of our house; she was going through a couple of hundred fabric swatches that were piled on the kitchen table, along with several china and silver patterns, and some odd squares of linoleum and porcelain floor tile; she had even begun painting the dining and living rooms with sample swaths of paint, quart cans of which sat out opened, used brushes lying across the rims. For dinner she was heating up some leftover pasta on the stove. In the den the kids were watching TV, rolling popcorn in bologna slices as a pre-dinner snack, and then spitting streams of Dr Pepper at each other through the gaps in their front teeth. When I asked Daisy what the heck was going on, she looked up and answered that she couldn't decide between a shiny or a not-so-shiny silk for the living-room curtains and what did I think?

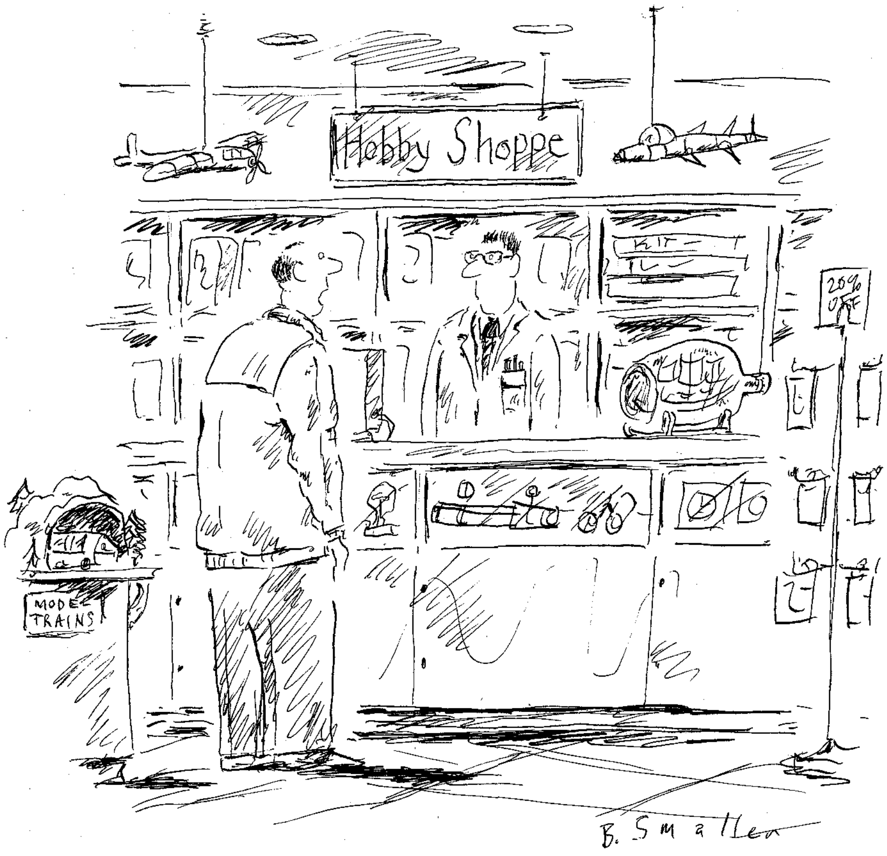
She was grinning, though painfully, as if part of her could see and hear the miserable scene and could understand that another part was taking over. I couldn't holler right then as I wanted to, and instead just grumbled, "Whatever, dear," and went to the bedroom and stripped out of my dusty work clothes and turned on the water in the shower as hot as I could bear, because there's nothing like a good near-scald to set you right again, to take you out of a time line and set you momentarily free. And suddenly I was even feeling a little chubby down there with the hot trickles in my crack and so gave myself a couple of exploratory tugs, when Daisy opened the shower door and stepped inside, paint-splattered clothes and all.

"Jerry," she said, crying, through the billowing steam. "Jerry, I'm sorry."

I didn't answer and she said it again, said my name again, with her rolling, singsong, messed-up "R"s, and I hugged her, clutching her beneath the spray.

"So hot!" she gasped, recoiling, and I let go, but she grabbed back and held me tight, tighter and tighter, until she got used to the temperature. Then she kissed me, and kissed me again, and when I kissed her back I thought I was tasting something mineral, like thinner or paint, but when we broke for air I could see the faded wash of pink on her chin, on her mouth: she'd bitten her tongue trying to stand the hot water.

I pointed the showerhead away from us and she took off her wet clothes and said, "Make love to me," and we started to screw on the built-in bench of the shower stall, something we hadn't done



"I'm looking for an outside interest I can do from my couch."

"You always get the good gossip out here around the vodka cooler."

since we first bought the house, before Jack was born. I remember Daisy being five months pregnant and showing in a way I hadn't expected would be so attractive, the smooth, sheened bulge of her belly and her popped-out belly button and the changed size and color of her nipples, long like the nipples on baby bottles and the color of dark caramels. Daisy was not voluptuous, which I liked, with her long, lean torso and shortish Asian legs (perfectly hairless) and her breasts that were shaped in the form of gently pitched dunes, these delicate pale hillocks. I realize I may be waxing pathetic here, your basic sorry white dude afflicted with what Theresa nowadays refers to as "Saigon syndrome" ("Me so hor-ny, G.I. Joe!"), but I'm not really sorry, because the fact is I found her desirable precisely because she was put together differently from what I was used to, as it were; she was totally unlike the wide-hipped Italian or leggy Irish girls or the broad-bottomed Polish chicks from Our Lady of Wherever I had been raised on since youth and who, compared with Daisy, seemed pretty dreadful contraptions.

Unfair, I know, unfair.

Though that evening in the shower, eight years into our marriage, I wasn't so much enamored of Daisy as I was hopeful for any break in her strange mood. I thought (or so I thought later) that some good coarse sex might disturb the disturbance, shunt aside the offending system, and it might have worked had our little Theresa not opened the shower door and stood watching for God knows how long as I was engaging her mother in the doggie-style stance we tended to employ when things between us weren't perfectly fine. Daisy must have peered around and seen Theresa standing there sucking on her thumb and shoved me off so hard I slipped and fell onto my back, providing a second sighting of me that made Theresa actually step back. I covered myself and asked her what she wanted and she couldn't answer and then Daisy yelled at her to tell us.

Theresa said, "The macaroni is on fire, and Jack can't put it out."

"Take care of her!" I said to Daisy, and then grabbed a towel to wrap myself with and ran down to the kitchen, where Jack was tossing handfuls of water at the frying pan as it roared up in flames. The steam and smoke were pooling at the ceiling, and, as I pulled Jack away into the dining room, he fought me a little, trying to go back.

"Dad, it's burning the metal," he said, pointing to the steel hood above the stove, its painted surface blackening.

"Stay right here," I told him, tamping down on his shoulders. "O.K.?"

I rushed in and opened the bottom drawer of the stove, where Daisy kept the pot lids, searching for one large enough to cover the big skillet. I found one and tossed it on, but it was about an inch shy all around and the flames flickered low only for a second, then leaped up again. Daisy always used a lot of butter or oil, and so I took off my bath towel and folded it and tried to smother the whole pan, the fire licking up where I wasn't pressing hard enough, singeing my forearm and chest hairs and making me instantly consider all things from the narrow, terrified view of my fast-shrinking privates, and then Jack ran forward and tried to help by tugging down the edge of the towel. I picked him up and carried him to the living room and hurled him onto one of the as yet unreturned sofas, shouting "Stay put!" and also warning him not to soil the upholstery, if he valued his life. But by then the towel had caught fire and instinctively I did what Jack had already tried, splashing on water with my hands and then with a coffee mug, which did no good at all. So I finally took the skillet by the handle and opened the sliding door to the deck and stepped out. The firelight caught the attention of our back neighbors, the Lipschers, who were throwing a small dinner party on their patio. I'd spoken to the husband maybe once or twice, the wife three or four times; we'd invited them over a couple of times for barbecues but they'd never made it. They were into tony Manhattan-type gatherings, with candles and French wine and testy, clever conversation (you could hear every word from our deck) about Broadway plays or Israel or their favorite Caribbean islands, everyone constantly interrupting everyone else in their bid to impress one another, all in tones that said they weren't. But the sight of me clearly got their attention. Someone at the table said "Look at that!" and with the skillet in one hand I waved with the other, the Lipschers and their guests limply waving back. For some reason it didn't seem neighborly to chuck the frying pan, so I held it out in full flambé, Daisy now stepping out in her towel with the kids in tow, all of us waiting for the fire to die out. It took a while. When it finally did, Barry Lipscher said, "Hey there, Battle, you want to end the show now? We're still eating here, if you don't mind."

To this Daisy unhooked her bath sheet and wrapped it around my waist, then turned to the Lipschers and their guests in all her foxy loveliness and gave them the finger. If I remember right, Theresa did the same, Jack and I grinning idiotically as we trailed our women into the house.

But in truth, I'm afraid, it didn't quite end up as nicely as all that—young family Battle triumphant in solidarity, chuckling over the charred cabinetry and the toasty scent of burned pasta.

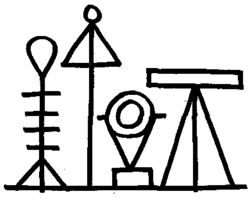
"Clean this up," I said to Daisy, my voice nothing but a cold instrument. "We'll talk tomorrow."

The next day, I instituted what Pop had suggested, basically placing Daisy under house arrest for the week (no car keys, no credit cards, twenty dollars cash), and promising her that I'd never speak to her again unless she sent back all the samples and swatches and kept the house in an acceptable state and made proper meals for the kids and checked with me from that point on before she bought anything—I mean *anything*—other than staples like milk and bread or underwear or school supplies.

In those days I could threaten someone like that. I had got into the habit at Battle Brothers, hollering at the fellas all day and lecturing my subcontractors and even talking tough to my customers, if they got to be too clingy or whiny or just plain pains in the ass, which at some point in every job they all did. But maybe it wasn't so much the habit itself as it was its effectiveness that I kept returning to—how I could reliably get all sorts of people to move it or jump or shut the hell up. People say that I'm like Pop that way, that I'll get this expression on my face, as if whatever you're saying or doing is this crime, and that for you not to desist would be the most contemptible of acts.

And then I'll say what I want to have happen, what I want done, as I did that morning to Daisy. She could hardly look at me as she sat on the toilet while I shaved, her straight hair screening her face like those beaded curtains we all used to have. I repeated myself, then left for work and didn't call home all day. I wanted to call but I held firm, even as I imagined a disaster like a flood in the basement or an electrical fire. But it was one of those times as a husband when you have to decline the counsel of sound judgment and valor and gut-piercing panics and yield instead to the matchless attraction of simply making your damn point. To Daisy, the point was this: I'm leaving it to you, babe, and you alone.

Daisy's sense of fearless self-reliance was partly, I suppose, why I was so taken with her to begin with. She'd come to the States by herself, just twenty years old, going to school and living not in a dormitory or in one of those single-women's residences but in an apartment in a needle-littered Harlem tenement with some post-Marxist black-chick Ph.D. with a last name like Weiss, the cultural compaction of which really blew my mind. I couldn't imagine what Daisy's parents thought about any of this, and I never found out. They were seminarians, I guess, but for one reason or another she rarely talked about them, and during our years together I didn't prod her to say much more about them or the rest of her family in Korea. She never seemed to mind. All I knew was that of four or five children she probably wasn't the favorite, and that the only person from her family to show up for our wedding was an older brother with a pinched-up face who didn't smile or say a word during the rehearsal dinner and hotly scolded her afterward in the parking lot, I'm sure for marrying a white guy. He was also tugging on her arm in a way that I didn't like, and I ended up having to push him a bit too hard against his taxi to get him to release her. He cursed me and cursed Daisy and then they cursed each other for what seemed like five minutes, all this spiky language hurtling back and forth, until finally she laid into him with some choice American swear words and he relented, muffling his ears as he got into the taxi. He wasn't at the ceremony the next day, and I don't think Daisy even noticed.



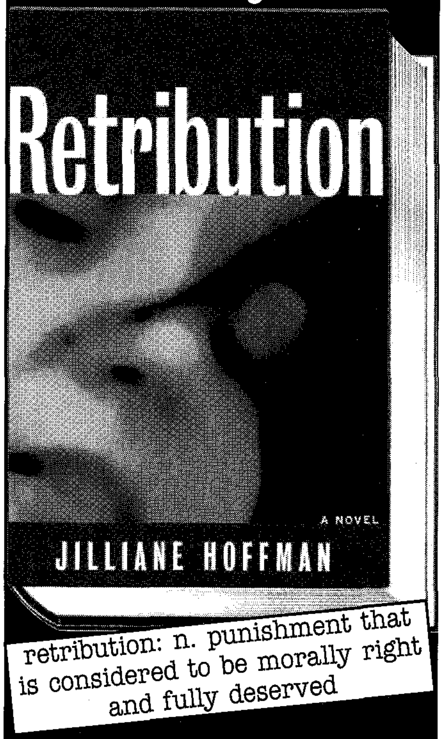
When I got home from work, the place wasn't on fire and there were no ambulances parked on the lawn. I rolled my pickup inside the garage and went in. The house was peerlessly clean and quiet and the kids were in the den playing and there was a tuna casserole bubbling away in the oven, four place settings sparkling on the kitchen table. The only thing missing was Daisy. I asked the kids where she was and they didn't know. I looked out back and in the street. Then I went to our bedroom, which was empty but neat, and when I walked into the bathroom there Daisy was, still dressed in her pink robe with baby-blue piping, sitting on the edge of the toilet exactly as she had been eight hours earlier, as if she'd been cast right into the cool porcelain.

"I fixed the house," she said, her voice husky, dried out.

"Yeah," I said, just as I might to the guys, as though it were no more than I'd expected. It's always best, when you're trying to get things done, to utter the absolute minimum. You made it rain? O.K. You moved heaven and earth? Fine. Pop was the one who showed me how effective it can be to say grindingly little at the very moments when you ought to say a lot, when you could easily be generous with praise or forgiveness, when you could tender all you had and no one would ask for anything extra in return.

I know. I know about this. I do.

So when Daisy went on to say, "The other stuff, too. I got rid of it all. I did



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what you want, Jerry," what did I say back but simply, "Right," with a slight tip of the head, and a tough-guy grunt, which you'd think would be just what Daisy had had to deal with all her inscrutable Oriental life, and probably had, and was likely part of the reason she'd ended up with someone like me, some average American Guido she figured would have more than plenty to say, entreating her every second with his hands and his hips and with his heart bleeding all over.

Daisy didn't say anything and neither did I, and for a moment our normally cramped bathroom felt very large, the only sound coming from the running toilet tank, with its wasteful ever-wash that I've always meant to fix but never actually have fixed, even to this day. Daisy got up then and brushed past me and I could hear her walk out of our bedroom and down the hallway to the kitchen. I showered and changed and when I got to the table the kids were eating their dinner, as usual furiously wolfing down their food like a pair of street urchins who'd broken into a cake shop. Daisy was preparing my plate. Jack and Theresa were forever hungry, and the only time I can remember them not eating was after Daisy was buried and we had a gathering at the house, the two of them sitting glumly on the sofa, a plate of cold shrimp and capicola balanced between them on their legs.

Daisy set down my dinner, and she sat, too, but she wasn't eating. After serving all of us seconds, she took our plates and began cleaning up. The kids chattered but Daisy and I didn't say a word to each other. Breakfast the next morning was the same, and it was like that for the rest of that week and the week after that. Finally, I got tired of the whole thing, and when Pop asked I told him that his method was fine except for the rageful misery and silences. He told me to keep it in my pants a bit longer, that I'd break her and also break myself of "the need to please her all the time," and that he and Ma would stop by on Saturday to run interference. I asked him to come over and play with the kids, so I could patch things up with Daisy, perhaps take a drive to Robert Moses and sit on the grassy dunes and tell her that I wished for our life to be normal again, though in truth the visit would mean that Ma would take the kids out to the playground or to a matinée and then somehow cobble together a gut-busting dinner of meatballs and sausages and pasta and a roast, with Pop haranguing me about the state of our business and then inevitably bringing up Bobby.

When my parents arrived, Daisy was still in the bedroom getting dressed. No matter what her state of mind or what was going on, she always pulled herself together for them, and particularly for Pop. She'd wear her newest outfit and full makeup, and Pop, of course, lapped it up. He loved how she made silly mistakes in English and always laughed at his jokes and listened to his autodidact's crank theories and opinions about the brutality of man and the falsity of religion and the conspiring forces of a new world order that would enslave all good men in a socialist vise-grip of eco-feminism and bisexuality and miscegenation (notwithstanding my and Daisy's lovely offspring). No one but Pop could elicit that kind of humoring and attention from her, no one I'm sure except for Bobby Battle, M.I.A., whom she had never met but I know she would have loved.

Daisy floated out in a new hot-pink-with-white-polka-dot silk minidress and a matching scarf tied around her throat, with a white hair band holding up her black hair. She kissed my mother, who was already unloading from the fridge everything that we might possibly eat for dinner, culling as she went for mold and wilt and freezer burn. My mother was nothing if not dependable. It's a terrible thing to admit, but I used to think she wasn't the swiftest doe in the forest, because she rarely did anything but keep house and feed everybody and try to make Pop's life run smoothly and comfortably, even when he had several affairs and was universally acknowledged to be a Hall of Fame pain in the ass. She rarely read the newspaper and never read a book and wasn't even interested in movies or television; her main personal activity was shopping for clothes, always in a combination of Queens Boulevard and country-club styles, bright bold colors and white patent-leather bags and shoes and bug-eye sunglasses. Every once in a while, on no special occasion, Pop would spring for a marble-size diamond ring or a string of fat pearls, and I suspect it was my mother exacting tribute for his latest exposed dalliance. Lately I've been thinking that her lack was more emotional than intellectual; she preferred to keep her life as uncomplicated as possible, and understood that more thought would lead only to misery, to the realization that she could never leave him, that she could never really start over again.

Daisy twirled for my father and said, "What you think, Pop?"

"Gorgeous, doll, gorgeous." Pop used "doll" whenever they were together, "your old lady" or "your wife" when speaking about her to me.

"I got it at Macy's," she said, hardly glancing over. "It wasn't on sale price, but I couldn't wait."

"On you, it's a bargain at twice the price."

"You super guy, Pop."

"But I'm speechless at this moment," he said, smiling his here's-how-to-handle-a-woman smile. "As Santayana once said, 'Beauty as we feel it is something indescribable: what it is or what it means can never be said.' "

"You too much, Pop!"

"Is this a liver or a beefsteak?" Ma said, holding up a frozen brown slab.

No one answered, since no one knew.

Ma, accustomed to the non-reply, said, "I hope it's a beefsteak."

"The dress looks real good," I said to Daisy, feeling I should say something. And then I was all set to offer more. I was going to suggest running her right out to the department store and buying a bauble to go with the pretty dress, some earrings maybe, when Pop pulled a long dark-blue velveteen jewelry case from his pocket and presented it to Daisy.

"For me?"

"Of course it's for you, doll. Open it."

She cracked the lid. It was a string of freshwater pearls, the beads small but delicate and dazzling in their iridescence. It was amazingly tasteful, even for Pop, who always surprised me with his eye for finish and detail.

"Look, Jerry, look what Pop got!" Daisy said.

"A customer of mine imports these from Japan, and he gave me a nice rate on them. They're just as good as Mikimoto."

"It's not my birthday even," Daisy said, hushed by the glitter in her hands. "This is so nice."

"Call it a reward, for all the hardship of the last couple of weeks. Ask Ma over there. It's no picnic, putting up with us Battle men. We're stubborn and proud and we ask no less than the world of our women. The world. Your husband Jerome here is no different. We all know he can be sullen, but that's because he's always been too serious. Not like Bobby, who knows what real fun is. He's just like you. So you better learn patience, with this one."

Pop tousled my hair, and I let him, because incredulity freezes you, because I was like that back then, because Pop was Pop and I wasn't. Daisy was the one who stopped him, if only because she was hugging him, kissing him on the forehead and cheek, hooting a little, almost vibrating with glee and gratitude. Ma had already ceased paying further attention to the scene, and had gone back to the daily calculus of how to make a meal from what was at hand. The kids ran in from outside and Pop had a handful of hard candies for them, toffees and sours and butterscotches. This was the minor parade my father always finessed for himself, wherever he went: my wife and kids joyous with the old man. I asked Ma if she needed anything.

"I don't think so, honey," she said. She was scraping the brown rime from the frozen meat, a little pile of root-beer-colored shavings collecting at the edge of her knife blade. "I think I have everything I need."

In the weeks after Pop came bearing gifts, everything pretty much went to shit. It did, it really did, though not in the manner I'd thought it would. I figured I'd be the one generating the enmity. I thought Pop's stunt (which I should have been ready for) and Daisy's giddy celebrations would lend me the pissy high ground, at least for a few days, long enough to keep Daisy on the defensive and not out there spending our future, long enough to allow me to figure out how to fix the problem without forever placing her under house arrest. But Daisy was the one who took umbrage. She wouldn't speak to me, her silence made much more unpleasant by the fact that she seemed livelier and brighter in her dealings with everyone else.

Did the time mark a strange kind of renaissance for her? I really don't know. What's clear to me is that Daisy pretty much exploded with life, and our life exploded right along with her. Up to then, my basic conception of crazy was the one I'd held since youth: the picture of a raven-haired Irish girl named Clara who climbed the trees in her pleated Catholic-school skirt not wearing underwear and lobbed Emily Dickinson down to me in a wraithlike voice ("I cannot live with You— It would be Life—and Life is over there— Behind the Shelf"), my trousers clingy with fear and arousal.

With Daisy, neither I nor anyone else, not even Dr. Derricone, knew the extent of her troubles, the ornate reach and complication. Those initial shopping sprees would in the end seem like the smallest indiscretions—filched candy from the drugstore, a lingering ass pat at a neighborhood cocktail party—nothing you couldn't slough off with a laugh, nothing you couldn't later recall with some wistful fondness.

After that weekend when she stopped talking to me, Daisy's metabolism went into overdrive. We usually went to bed at eleven or so, but she started getting up at five in the morning, and then four and three and two, until it got to the point where she didn't even get ready for bed, not bothering to change into a nightgown or brush her teeth. A couple of times in the middle of the night I awoke to the *plash-plash* of water, and peered through the curtains to see, in lovely silhouette, Daisy paddling around in the pool with the inner tube hooped beneath her arms. She was naked, just going back and forth, and I had the thought that I should go out there and keep her company. But I desperately needed my sleep back then (these days it's a different story, as I lie in wait for the muted *thwap* of the morning paper on the driveway) and, rather than get up, I would fall back into the pillow and scratch at myself half-mast and maybe dream in sentimental hues of gorgeous black swans who always swim alone.

After a couple of weeks, I didn't even

notice that Daisy was never in bed. She probably slept a few hours while the kids were in school, but I can't be sure of that. As for sex, it wasn't happening, and not only because she wasn't talking to me. Pure talk was never that important to us anyway, even at the beginning, when we were mostly joking and flirting, for though her English was more than passable it was rudimentary enough for us to stay clear of nuanced discussions, which suited me fine. The truth was that while I was hungering for her I had an equally keen desire to hold out as long as I could, because if she had any power over me it was sexual power, which, most other things being equal, is what all women should easily have over all men. Daisy could always, please forgive me, float my boat, top my prop; she could always crank up the generators at any moment and make me feel as if every last cell in my body were overjuiced and soon to be derelict if not immediately launched toward something warm and soft. In her own way she was a performer, as they say actors can be when they enter a room; something in them switches on and suddenly everybody is abject with confused misery and love.

One night the doorbell rang and roused me from a deep sleep and I opened the door to find my wife wrapped in a big blue poly tarp with a burly young police officer standing behind her, waving a long flashlight.

"Are you the head of this household, sir?" he asked, momentarily blinding me with the beam, and fully waking me up.

"You wanna kill the light, chief?"

"Sorry, sir," he said, slipping the flashlight into his belt. "Are you the head of household?"

"If you mean am I the owner, then yes."

"Is this your wife?"

I looked at Daisy, who looked glum, as though this were yet another chore of her unglamorous life.

"Yes. She's my wife."

"She was at the elementary school, in the playground there. There was a complaint."

"What? Is it illegal, to be over there?"

"I believe there's a school-grounds curfew, sir, but that wasn't the whole problem."

"Oh, yeah?"

Daisy then said, "Just cut it out, Jerry. Good night, officer. Thanks for the ride home." She tippy-toed and pecked him on the cheek, and then stepped inside. "Oh, this is yours."

She peeled the tarp from herself and handed it to him. She was wearing only sneakers, white Keds with the blue pencil stripe on the rubber. The young cop thanked her and said good night, as if it were a goddam date or something. Daisy disappeared inside.

The cop said, "Sir, if you could please tell your wife I'll have to cite her the next time."

"There's not going to be a goddam next time!"

"I'm just saying—"

"Good night," I said, and slammed the door.

I found Daisy in the kitchen, making egg salad for a sandwich. She had the eggs going at a furious boil in the stockpot, and the bread in the toaster; she had jars of mayonnaise and mustard and sweet-pickle relish out on the counter, celery and carrot and onion on the cutting board, and she had the ice-blue German chef's knife in her hand, the one that Pop had given her for Christmas. But the strange thing was that it was all so casual, as if a nude woman in sneakers chopping vegetables at three in the morning after a neighborhood police sweep were de rigueur around here, our customary midsummer night's dream.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm hungry. You want to eat, too?"

"No, I don't."

"You have trouble sleeping?"

"What do you think, Daisy?"

She didn't answer, engrossed as she was in the julienned stalks of carrot and celery. She was working carefully but fast, making perfect dices as she went, the crisp *chock-chock-chock* of the blade on the cutting board undoubtedly keeping time with her ever-quickening synaptic pulses. I didn't want to disturb her; I was going to wait until she was done, but perhaps it was because of my state of angry half sleep or the searingly bright fluorescent kitchen lights or the notion of my supple-bodied immigrant wife tooling around in a squad car with a wide-eyed cop that I had to holler, "This is total shit!"

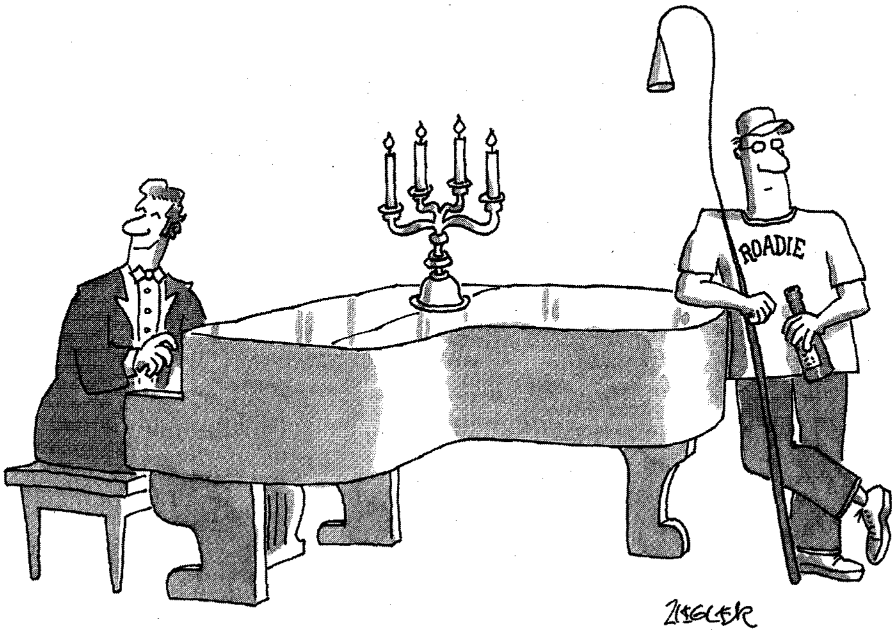
She looked around with unfeigned gravity and said, "Go back to sleep, Jerry."

"This is going to stop," I said. "You're going to see Dr. Derricone tomorrow. I'll go with you."

"Go to sleep, Jerry."

"You're going to see him about this, and I mean it this time. No ranting at him. No threats. No scenes with his receptionist."

"He's a complete fool," she said, with a perfect, faintly English accent, as if she'd heard some actress say the phrase in a TV movie or on a soap. Daisy was a talented mimic, when she wanted to be. "They are all complete and utter fools."



"I don't care if you think he's the King of Siam. Dr. Derricone has been around a long time and you'll show him respect. He's seen it all and he's going to help you."

"I don't want help from him, or nobody!" she cried, confusingly, though of course I knew what she meant.

"That's it, now, Daisy! I mean it. I've had enough!"

"Me, too!" she shouted, and I thought about the kids for a second, how they'd wake up to their mother's distressed cry and probably think I was doing something horrible to her, which I never ever did. Although in those days I let myself think about such things every now and then. I imagined picking up her petite body and flinging her onto the bed as you might a cat, mostly because I thought that she could handle it, and that the ugly pleasurable surge would somehow satisfy the moment and make everything good and right. Spoken like a veritable wife beater, I realize, and I can't defend myself, except to say that Daisy was never a completely passive party in our troubles. She was ready to say or do whatever it took to make me feel the afflictions settled so insolvently within her.

"Quiet down," I told her. "You'll wake up the kids."

"I don't care!" she cried, and that's when it happened. She lunged at me, in her splendid nakedness, knife and all, her eyes dull with the chill of empty space. And I froze, not so much with fear (of which there was plenty) as with a kind of abstention, for the horror of what was happening was too realistic to even begin to consider fright. And the significant detail is not that Daisy missed my throat with the chef's knife by a mere thumb's width, jabbing the point a good two inches into the door of the refrigerator (the perfect slit is still there, rusty around the pushed-in edges), but that when we both fully returned to the moment, our faces almost touching, we each saw in the other the same amazing wish that she hadn't flinched.

Not that I didn't want to live.

I did want to live, just not that way.

Daisy, suddenly scared out of her craziness, broke down and collapsed in a naked heap on the linoleum floor, crying her eyes out.

So with the first light Dr. Derricone appeared with his scuffed black bag and before the kids were even awake he gave Daisy a sample bottle of Valium with instructions to keep taking them as long as she felt, as he put it, "too frisky." I don't know what a trained specialist would have said, what a psychiatrist or psychologist would have diagnosed as her particular state or behavior; I wasn't even thinking of "the right thing to do." I just needed to jam hard on the brakes, to do whatever it took to stop the train. Frank Derricone was Ma and Pop's doctor; he'd delivered me and Bobby and dozens of my cousins and nephews and then Jack and Theresa. He was indeed a general practitioner of the grand old school, in that he believed that good doctoring, as in most professions, was a matter of common sense, empirically applied. This salty view had no doubt served him well for the thirty years up to that point, and continued to do so for the twenty-five or so more years afterward, and I don't doubt that Daisy was among only a handful of his patients who didn't end up healthy and long-lived. And while I don't blame Frank Derricone in the least—I'm not the one who can, at least not in any scenario or space-time continuum or alternative universe I can come up with—I do wonder what might have been, and I can't ignore what the doctor said to me at a party in honor of his retirement this past spring, when he mentioned that it probably wasn't the best thing to have kept Daisy on sedatives after she'd come down from her manic heights. For who really imagined that there could be a state grayer than gray for our mad happy Daisy, lower than low, when suddenly it was all she could do to lift herself out of the bed in the morning and drag a brush through her tangled, unwashed hair? Who knew that while I was at work and the kids were at day camp she'd steadily medicate herself on the back patio with Valiums and a case of beer, and on one stifling summer afternoon in August go so far as to induce herself into a dream of buoyancy, such that she, unclothed as she preferred, drifted floatless into the pool, perhaps paddling a calm yard or two, before flying, like a seabird, straight down to the bottom. ♦

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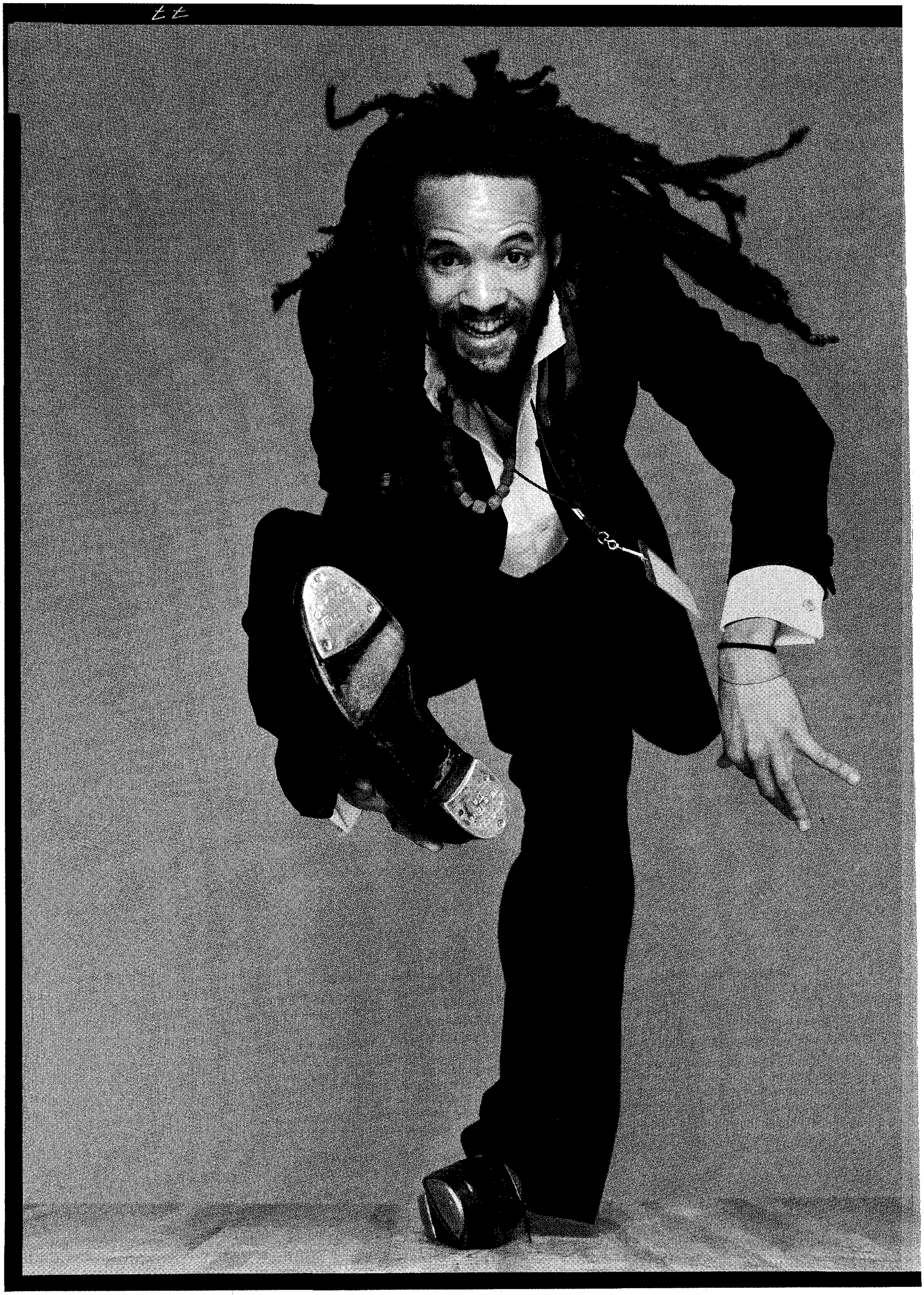

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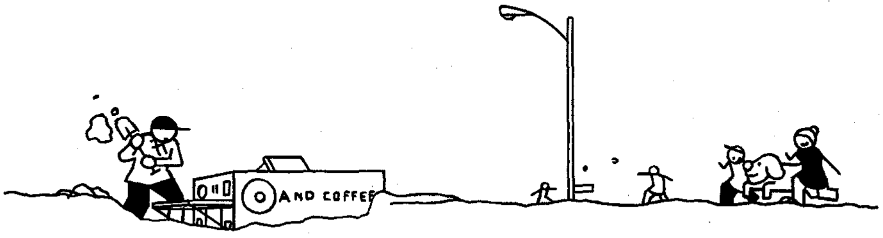


DANCING

TAKING STEPS

Savion Glover at the Joyce Theatre.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

The tap virtuoso Savion Glover began his career as a child star, and, because he was so young, reviewers often felt free to give him advice. He should show a little warmth, they said, not perform like a machine (the child-prodigy syndrome). He should broaden his work, include more tones, more moods. This was all good counsel, and Glover followed some of it—in his own way. Now thirty years old, he has warmth and moods and nuances, but they are all in his feet. At the same time, one no longer feels like giving him advice—certainly not after his recent three-week season, called "Improvography," at the Joyce. The first half, the forty minutes before intermission, was just Glover, solo, with a five-piece jazz band, and it was the finest tap dancing I have ever seen.

Glover wanders onstage, unceremoniously, together with the band. They play "The Way You Look Tonight," and he sings along. He's not a very good singer, but, as with Fred Astaire, you like him for doing it anyway. As he's singing, his feet start moving in place. The tapping here is like lace, complicated, but still ingratiating. Then, having convinced us that he's just a nice little hoofer, Glover stuffs his mike into his back pocket and starts laying down the business. This is not like lace anymore. It is like those eighty-step equations which math professors need three blackboards to write out. The rhythms declare themselves, then change, then take flight, then zoom off in a different direction, then circle back, then take off again. You try to keep track; you manage, for a while. When at last he slows down to a steady clomping, you're grateful. He's giving you a breather.

The whole first act follows that pattern. The band plays a standard—"One for My Baby," "My Favorite Things," "Jingle Bells"—and Glover sings for a minute. Then he takes off again. Each passage is different: heroic or witty or pensive. Glover is a perfect illustration of the relationship between technique and art. Most living tap dancers would probably agree that no one has ever achieved greater virtuosity than Glover. He can do more things, faster and more clearly—so that however small the sound, it is hearable—than any other tapper. That alone won't make you an artist. But, if art is where you're headed, such an endowment frees you. "I try to keep my chops up," Glover told Jane Goldberg, for *Dance Magazine*, "so I can just be." You have technique so that you can forget about technique, and say something.

Glover has always been an inward-turning performer. As a child, he rarely looked up when he danced. By the time of the 1996 show "Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk," which he choreographed and starred in, that lack of showmanship seemed to have a dramatic function. "Noise/Funk" was about the history of black people, and, above all, black dance, in America. It was an angry show, and Glover's unwillingness to look at the audience—he performed one long solo with his back squarely to us—fit right in. Over the past few years, it seemed to me that he was softening up a bit. But in the Joyce show he was back on form. He looked at anything—the flies, the floor, the amplifiers—rather than at the audience. Finally, in the middle of Act I, he raised his face and spoke to us, to introduce the musicians (Tommy James on piano, Patience Higgins on saxophone and flute, Andy McCloud on bass, Brian Grice on drums, James Zollar on trumpet, all of them marvellous). But then he ended the roll call by saying, "I'm your host—my name is Spike Lee." This was a joke, but, as Freud said, jokes have meaning. In some measure, Glover wants to remain hidden from us. In the old days, many black tappers worked night clubs, where, in addition to dancing, they had to chat and patter and spread fake cheer while people in the audience talked among themselves. Of course, this business of enforced Negro affability goes back much further, to the minstrel shows. Glover knows all about it—it was a central theme of his contributions to "Noise/Funk." And though his reserve may be natural to him, it is also, unquestionably, a political stand. Like Miles Davis, to whom he has often been compared, he will perform, and let us watch, but that doesn't mean he's our friend.

The tone of his introversion has changed, however. Something in him has caught up with it, incorporated it, so that he no longer seems to be pushing us away. He is simply occupying a space of his own, which is different from ours. And he does share with us some of his personality, by showing us how he shares it with the band. The byplay between dancers and musicians is always a lovely part of tap performance, and in "Improvography" it was

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Glover is a perfect illustration of the relationship between technique and art.

especially lovely, because Glover, with his musical sophistication, has a great deal to say to a band. We got the classic format, with each musician singled out in a solo, during which he and Glover played off each other, trading stories, as it were. Glover was more relaxed here than anywhere else in the show, partly, I guess, because the mantle of stardom was temporarily lifted from him—he was just jamming with the guys—but mostly, I think, because he was now interacting with his kind of people, musicians. And watching his happy fellowship with them was warmth enough for me. Glover's shows may leave some people behind, but that's always true with jazz, and more true with bebop, which is basically Glover's game. Bop doesn't woo you.

Lest we forget that, the first act didn't end with a showy climax. The tapping just sort of trailed off. A backlight came on, framing Glover's body in silhouette, and now we could see the sweat pouring out of his beard and off his fingers—in streams, not drops. That's what forty minutes of this kind of dancing involves physically. As for what it means psychologically, I don't know, but at the end Glover stopped moving and looked at us one last time, with an expression almost of fear. Then he collapsed on the floor, and the lights went out. There was no curtain call.

Recently, in interviews, Glover has been sounding very conservative. Largely because of him (and his mentor, Gregory Hines), a revival of tap dancing is now under way, not just in the United States but also in Europe and Asia, and a lot of this new tap is not to Glover's liking, because it is "fusion." There are now "gymnastic" tappers, hip-hop tappers, and samba tappers. "They're ruining us," Glover told Goldberg in the *Dance* interview. "You don't mix bananas with macaroni and cheese." He says he's now devoting himself to getting out the "information," by which he means the principles of classic tap, as done by the masters who came before him. To me, Glover has never been anything but classical—floor-bound, not aerial; aural, not visual; a drummer, almost, more than a dancer—and his shows have always been full of tap *pietas*, invocations of the elders. Even his refusal to endear himself to the audience could be seen as a mark of that sentiment: forget the charm, just look at the tapping. These days, however, he is becoming even more austere. Gone are the outré getups he used to perform in: the joke T-shirts, the pedal pushers that let you see the miking wires going up his legs, looking like intravenous tubes. At the Joyce, he wore a dark suit.

But at the same time that Glover wants to restore tap to purity he also wants to broaden it, by making ensemble numbers. Despite its celebrated duos and groups—the Nicholas Brothers, Coles and Atkins, the Four Step Brothers—tap is fundamentally a solo form, because at its best it uses improvisation, and you can't make group patterns if everyone is doing his own thing. From this limitation—solo improvisation—comes tap's great strength, its status as an act of personal heroism: naked, here-I-stand. Nevertheless, the limitation is a limitation, emotionally and commercially. Glover wants to push past it, and in "Noise/Funk" he did so, creating group numbers that plumbed many different states of being. In the Joyce show, he clearly wanted to do the same thing. Most of the second act was devoted to ensemble dances, performed by Glover's current, eight-member company, Ti Dii. Everything about this act was as open and expansive as the first act was closed and concentrated. The music (on tape now) was more upbeat. There were women and men, white dancers and black dancers. The lighting and costumes changed from number to number. So, in some measure, did the mood. "Look at all these things!" Glover seemed to be saying. "Tap is more than solo, more than me." And none of it was half as interesting as he had been. Sometimes it looked quite standard. (As Brian Siebert wrote in the *Voice*, the tone of the women's entries was basically "Here come the ladies!") Maybe Glover didn't have enough time. Or maybe he needs a director. He had one, George C. Wolfe, for "Noise/Funk," and though Wolfe has overseen some lousy choreography in his time, perhaps he knows how to direct a good choreographer.

There's another possibility: that tap really isn't supposed to be an ensemble form. There were some thrilling parts in the second act, and without exception they were the improvisational solos. Two members of the company—Cartier Anthony Williams and Marshall Davis, Jr., both veterans of "Noise/Funk"—were granted considerable time alone. Williams, who is fourteen years old, did a number reminiscent of the teen-aged Glover: unrelaxed, uninflected, and stupendous. As for Davis, a tall, broody young man, his solo was a sort of textbook of tap, taking us patiently from the basics to the intermediate and on to the advanced. It was like bargello, deepening its colors every minute, but almost imperceptibly, so that you thought, How did I get here? When did this happen? Davis's emotional tone is different from Glover's, more unguarded and poignant. Still, like Glover, he looks at the floor. Cartier Anthony Williams looks up; he's young and excited, and he wants to see us seeing him. Expect him to be looking at the floor in about two years.

So perhaps tap is meant to be this way—not a lot of things, but just one thing, a product of deep and private thought. If so, it is in good company. Flamenco is the same kind of form. So is Kathak, from northern India. In the nineteenth century, virtuoso piano recitals were heavily improvisational performances in which the pianist, his hair flying and his cravat wilting, seemed to call forth his very soul. In earlier times, village storytellers—the scops and griots—probably undertook the same sort of tank dive. It seems to be what happens, ideally, in structured improvisation. If Glover wants to lead tap, or some tap, away from this burning center, good luck to him. The Joyce show doesn't prove he can't do it. He did it in "Noise/Funk"; maybe he can again. But, if he can't, and tap remains centered in the solo-improvisation tradition, that is a great tradition. ♦

From Harvard Magazine.

We have learned that the obituary of Erik Humphrey Gordon '95, which appeared in the July-August '01 issue, was based on false information provided by the subject himself in an effort to get off Harvard's mailing list. Mr. Gordon is alive and well in New York City. We apologize for the error.

Crimson faces all around.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

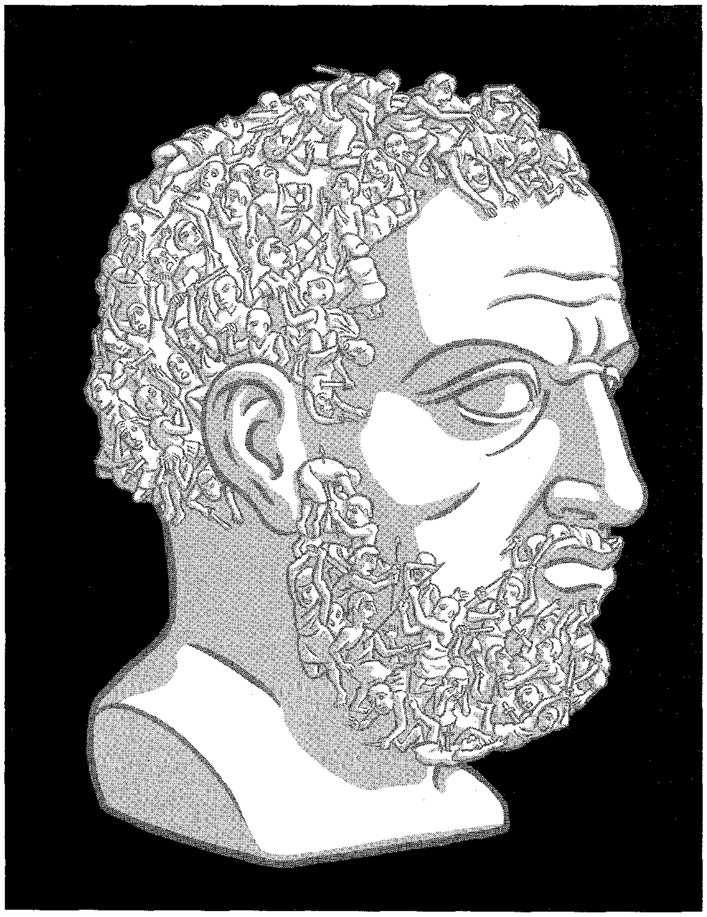
THEATRES OF WAR

Why the battles over ancient Athens still rage.

BY DANIEL MENDELSOHN

The early spring of 431 B.C. witnessed, at Athens, the outbreak of a great war, the commencement of a great book, and the première of a great play.

The war was the culmination of fifty years of simmering tensions between two superpowers: Athens, a direct democracy, and Sparta, a militaristic oligarchy. It was, naturally, advertised as a war of liberation (each side claimed to be freeing some injured third party), but it was really a struggle for total domination of the Greek world. It began relatively small—a diplomatic crisis involving Corinth, a Spartan ally; some low-level combat in a town near Athens—but metastasized into a conflict that lasted nearly three decades, involved numerous states, and resulted, finally, in the defeat of Athens and the abolition of its democratic institutions. Because Sparta and its allies dominated the southern peninsula known as the Peloponnese—and because the men who wrote the histories of the conflict were usually Athenians—the war came to be called the Peloponnesian. As the Yale historian Donald Kagan dryly points out in "The Peloponnesian War" (Viking; $29.95), his brisk, if tendentious, new account, the Spartans probably thought of the conflict as the Athenian War; but then there were no Spartan historians to call it that.



Historians have enlisted Thucydides in contemporary political causes.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The great book was the work of an affluent young Athenian who began taking notes "at the very outbreak" of hostilities, on the hunch that this would be "a great war and more worth writing about than any of those which had taken place in the past." About the life of the historian we know relatively little, apart from the crucial fact that he himself commanded troops in the war—something you might guess anyway from the soldierly lack of sentimentality that characterizes his book, which would in time come to be prized for its insistence on letting the reader "see the past clearly." This soldier-historian gave no official title to his work; it is usually referred to as, simply, the History. He was called Thucydides.

The great play was by an Athenian citizen in his mid-fifties who had been writing for the theatre since the age of thirty. Like the war, the play involved some small-scale violence in Corinth that eventually made its way to Athens; as with the war, it would be some time before people appreciated its magnitude. (When the play was entered in the annual springtime dramatic competition at Athens that year, it took third prize.) The playwright's name was Euripides. The play was called "Medea."

Thucydides' History is the only extant eyewitness account of the first twenty years of a war that was unlike anything anyone had ever seen—"the greatest disturbance," as he put it, "in the history of the Hellenes, affecting also a large part of the non-Hellenic world, and indeed, I might almost say, the whole of mankind." The war lasted so long that the author didn't live to finish his manuscript; it ends in midsentence during a description of the aftermath of a naval battle in 411. (We do know, from references in his text, that he lived to see Athens' ultimate surrender, in 404.) But such was his achievement that others who wrote about the war—for instance Xenophon, whose Hellenica covers the final decade of fighting—began where Thucydides left off.

Until the Peloponnesian War, warfare among the various Greek city-states had for centuries been a regular, predictable affair—part of the rhythmic cycle of seasons. You planted your crops, went away to do battle with this or that enemy, and (you hoped) were home for the harvest. The entire war, usually a matter of some disputed bit of borderland, would be decided in a single battle fought on a single day.

The war that began in the spring of 431 represented what Kagan rightly calls "a fundamental departure" from this tradition, not only in its scope, duration, and complexity but also in savagery and bitterness. After the Corinthian diplomatic crisis, ties between Athens and Sparta disintegrated. Hostilities began, one night early in 431, with a sneak attack on a small Athenian protectorate called Plataea. This sordid violation of the norms of

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Greek warfare set the tone for what was to come. As the conflict spread across many fronts, from the Hellespont to Sicily to the coast of Asia Minor, it began to seem frustratingly unwinnable. The result, Kagan emphasizes, was a cycle of cruelty and reprisal that ended in a "collapse in the habits, institutions, beliefs, and restraints that are the foundations of civilized life": schoolboys slaughtered in their classrooms by mercenaries, civilians murdered and enslaved en masse, supplicants dragged from (or burned at) altars, the war dead left to rot on the battlefield. In the end, the great standard-bearer of Greek civilization itself, Athens, collapsed. Bankrupt and imploding with civil strife after nearly three decades of fighting, it was finally defeated by an alliance of Sparta and Persia, the traditional enemy of the Greeks.

It was impossible to foresee any of this in the spring of 431. Athens was at its peak. Its empire of tribute-paying "allies" stretched across the Mediterranean, disciplined by a massive and well-trained navy. Its special national character—raucously democratic yet with an aristocratic esteem for high culture—was reflected in its leader, Pericles, who had populist appeal despite being a nobleman of what Kagan calls "the bluest blood." It was Pericles who advised his countrymen, during the first few years of the war, to follow an unusual and, to many Athenians, foolishly passive defensive strategy: to remain within the city's walls (including the so-called Long Walls that connected Athens to its port, Piraeus, four miles away) when the Spartans came to burn their crops, and to put their faith in their supremacy at sea. This plan took realistic account of Sparta's vast superiority on land and of the fragility of the Spartan Alliance: the Athenians would simply ship in their grain, while harrying the coastal cities of the Peloponnese until the Spartan Alliance disintegrated.

Kagan, the author of the standard four-volume scholarly study of the war, relates all this with crisp authority in his new, popularizing account. He is particularly shrewd about the economic and material realities behind certain kinds of political rhetoric. Where others might see in Pericles' policy an admirable Apollonian restraint, Kagan sees the calculations of a politician who knew he had only enough drachmas in the bank "to maintain his strategy for three years . . . but not for a fourth"—let alone a twenty-seventh.

The Periclean strategy, however, died with the man himself, in 429, in a plague that, within three years, killed a quarter of the city's population. (Thucydides, in a rare reference to his personal life, writes that he had the illness but survived.) Pericles' successors, first Cleon and then the aptly named Hyperbolus, were hawkish demagogues and came from the ranks of the so-called "new politicians"—pragmatic men whose attitudes, like their backgrounds, were anything but patrician. (Cleon's father made a fortune in leather, the source of great amusement for the comic playwright Aristophanes.) A crude but effective orator—Aristophanes memorably likens his rants to the squeals of a scalded pig—Cleon was principally responsible for pursuing the more aggressive policies that, many historians believe, cost Athens its empire.

Under Cleon's brash leadership, Athens' fortunes began to oscillate between surprise victories, like the capture of a tenth of all Sparta's citizen soldiers on the islet of Sphacteria in 425, and unnecessary defeats, like the debacle at Delium in 424, the outcome of a rash effort to force a decisive encounter. Under Cleon, too, Athens increasingly espoused a chilling Realpolitik. In 427, when the city of Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, revolted from the Athenian alliance known as the Delian League, Cleon proposed that all its adult men be put to death and all its women and children sold into slavery—a motion that the Athenian Assembly passed, only to revoke it, conscience-stricken, the next day.

Cleon repeatedly rejected opportunities for peace, and it was only in 421, a year after his death in battle, that a truce could be negotiated by his great political rival, the pious and cautious Nicias. This peace, however, soon fell apart because of the ambitions of another charismatic Athenian, Alcibiades, whose increasingly arrogant strategies led to ever greater disasters. These were moral as well as strategic. By the time the tiny island of Melos, a Spartan colony, refused to become part of Athens' alliance, in 416, the Athenians no longer felt any compunction about punishing civilians. In Book V of the History, Thucydides tersely relates how, after the Melians refused to capitulate to the Athenians' demands, all the Melian men were put to death and all the women and children sold into slavery.

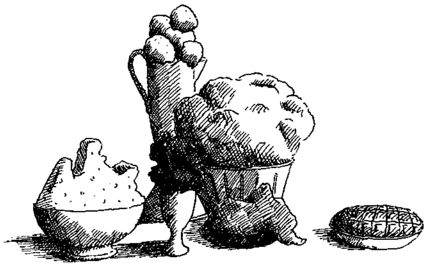
For many historians, Melos marks a watershed in Athens' moral decline. The next year, greedy for more empire, the Athenians invaded another island, Sicily. But the Sicilian Expedition, which occupies two full books of the History, turned out to be a watershed of another kind. It saw the complete annihilation of the Athenian armada, the death of Nicias, and the beginning of the end for Athens. Violent internal strife, economic troubles, a succession of oppressive regimes, and Sparta's alliance with Persia all put terrible pressures on Athens and led inexorably to the final, catastrophic defeat of the Athenian navy at Aegospotami, in the Hellespont, in 405. All but ten of Athens' ships were destroyed or captured and all the Athenian war prisoners—between three and four thousand—were put to death. In March, 404, exactly twenty-seven years after the war had begun, Athens capitulated. The Spartan allies gleefully destroyed the Long Walls, to the accompaniment of flutes.

To describe this war in all its complexity, Thucydides had to invent a new way of writing history. In his introduction, he says he will eschew "literary charm"—*mythodes*, a word related to "myth"—in favor of a carefully sifted accuracy. (The remark is partly a sideswipe at Herodotus, the historian whose account of the Greek victory against the Persians half a century earlier is characterized by a florid style and an inability to resist a good story.) But this desire for what we would call balanced and accurate reporting led, paradoxically, to a most distinctive literary device: the use of invented speeches and dialogues to illustrate the progress of the war and the combatants' thinking about it. Every key moment in the war—from the debate, in 431, over whether the Athenians should involve themselves in Corinth's altercation with its former colony to the controversies over Mytilene and Melos and the decision to invade Sicily—is cast as a dialogue that, as Thucydides admits, may not be a faithful reproduction of exactly what was said in this or that legislative session or diplomatic parley but does elucidate the ideologies at play. "My method has been," he writes, "to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation." This, more than anything, is what gives the History its unique texture: the vivid sense of an immensely complex conflict reflected, agonizingly, in hundreds of smaller conflicts, each one presenting painful choices, all leading to the great and terrible resolution.

Twenty-five years ago it was easy to teach Thucydides; all you had to do was talk about the Cold War. For most of the four decades from the end of the Second World War to the fall of the Soviet Union, the parallels between the Peloponnesian War and the Cold War seemed self-evident. You knew, as you read about Athens, about its boisterous democratic politics and fast-talking politicians, its adventurous intellectual and artistic spirit, that these were the good guys. They were clearly our own cultural forebears. And you knew, just as surely, as you read about Sparta, about its humorless militarism, geriatric regime, and deep antipathy to democracy, that these were bad guys. They, too, looked awfully familiar.

You also knew what it was like to live in a world divided between two sides "at the very height of their power and preparedness," as Thucydides puts it, and how blind adherence to the policies dictated by such polarization could result in fearful illogic. (As Kagan observes, the Spartans went to war to save an alliance they had created precisely to protect themselves from conflict.) In the bipartite world of the Cold War, you could choose to read Thucydides' carefully structured presentation of Athens' decline as a cautionary tale about the moral decay that accompanies abuses of imperial power. Or you might take Thucydides' apparent detachment to be a cautious endorsement of *Machtpolitik* as the grim requirement for being a superpower. ("It is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can," the Athenians blandly opine during their confrontation with the Melians.)

But whichever way you read Thucydides the bipolar structure of his world was instantly recognizable. Indeed, almost as soon as the Cold War had begun, people who knew their history were using the Peloponnesian War as a lens through which to examine the geopolitical scene. In February, 1947, Truman's Secretary of State, George Marshall, visited Princeton University on the occasion of Washington's birthday and declared, "I doubt seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding some of the basic international issues today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian War and the Fall of Athens." These words were a fulfillment of a hope that Thucydides himself sourly expresses:



> It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.

That the American soldier-diplomat could so emphatically invoke the Athenian soldier-historian after nearly twenty-four hundred years bears out the latter's declaration that his book would be "a possession for all time."

But what kind of possession, and whose? Times have changed—not just between Thucydides and Marshall but also between Marshall and the present. What do you make of Thucydides, or, for that matter, of the Peloponnesian War itself, in an era described by some as the "end of history," when there is only one superpower?

Kagan is alert to the opportunities presented by the new world order for rereading—or, some might say, rewriting—the Peloponnesian War. At the beginning of his account, he informs us that although the Greek conflict's "greatest influence as an analytical tool may have come during the Cold War," he wants his work to "meet the needs of readers in the 21st century." Self-consciously echoing Thucydides' famous declaration of objectivity, he writes that he will refrain from drawing parallels between the ancient event and any modern counterpart, in the hope that "an uninterrupted account will better allow readers to draw their own conclusions." Uninterrupted, yes, but not unbiased. Kagan is famous on campus and off for his conservatism (he numbers Ronald Reagan and Otto von Bismarck among his heroes), and you tend to come away from his history with an entirely different view of the war than the one you take away from Thucydides. Unsurprisingly, Kagan's view could be taken to support a very twenty-first-century project indeed: a unilateralist policy of preëmptive war.

The only way to do this, unfortunately, is to flatten Thucydides' presentation of the Peloponnesian War, stripping away the many voices and points of view that he worked so hard to include. (Most scholars believe that he spent a good part of the war travelling around Greece consulting archives and interviewing veterans for his History. He was able to do so because he'd been exiled from Athens in 424, after failing to prevent the Spartans from capturing the northern city of Amphipolis.) Thucydides tends to be shy about overtly intruding his own opinions into the proceedings; not so Kagan. This is most apparent in his revisionist championing of Cleon and other Athenian hawks, whose policies he consistently presents as the only reasonable choice. “It is tempting to blame Cleon for the breaking off of the negotiations,” goes a typical bit of rhetorical strong-arming. “But what, realistically, could have been achieved?” Anyone who hasn't read Thucydides will be inclined to agree. His explanation of the Athenians' distaste for peace was that “they were greedy for more.”

The desire to rehabilitate Cleon inevitably results in a corresponding denigration of the peace party (with its “apparently limitless forbearance”) and of the cautious policies recommended first by Pericles and then by Nicias, a figure for whom Kagan has particular disdain. Here Kagan's revisionism borders on being misleading. Nicias had tried to bluff the Athenian Assembly into abandoning the invasion of Sicily, declaring that it would require far greater expense than people realized; but they simply approved the additional ships and troops. This leads Kagan, bizarrely, to characterize the Sicilian Expedition as “the failed stratagem of Nicias.” As for the Athenians' massacre of the Melians, Kagan dismisses it as “the outlet they needed for their energy and frustration.”

THE ANSWER

Leaving the house,
the house will be
left completely,
from cellar to
attic my absence
entire.

Do I enter the world
the same,
my presence felt
from cloud
to ditch?

Only in departure whole.
Arrival
is always partial.

—*Bill Knott*

Kagan's perspective on events and personalities at first suggests an admirable desire to see the war with fresh and unsentimental eyes. But after a while it becomes hard not to ascribe his revisionism to plain hawkishness, a distaste for compromise and negotiation when armed conflict is possible. His book represents the Ollie North take on the Peloponnesian War: “If we'd only gone in there with more triremes,” he seems to be saying, “we would have won that sucker.”

Kagan isn't the only one offering a newly political reading of the Greeks and their wars. Victor Davis Hanson, a professor of classics at California State University, Fresno, is extremely prolific on the subject of ancient war; his most recent book, “Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think” (Doubleday; $27.50), is his fourteenth in twenty years. He is also a tireless opponent of what he sees as the ascendancy of feminists, post-structuralists, and the like, in the current academic study of the classics.

When Hanson writes about ancient infantry battles, he is absorbing and informative. Lately, he's been writing about more recent wars. In November, 2001, during the war in Afghanistan, he wrote an article for the *National Review Online* entitled “A Voice from the Past: General Thucydides Speaks About the War,” in which he poses questions about the situation and has Thucydides “answer” them, by means of citations from the History. To the question, for instance, of why Osama bin Laden and his terrorists “believed they could repeatedly get away with killing Americans, win prestige, and gain concessions—without eventually incurring the destructive wrath of the United States,” he has Thucydides give the following “answer,” from Book III:

> Their own prosperity could not dissuade them from affronting danger; but blindly confident in the future, and full of hopes beyond their power though not beyond their ambition, they declared war and made their decision to prefer might to right. Their attacks were determined not by provocation but by the moment which seemed propitious.

Hanson neglects to mention that this implicit endorsement of “destructive wrath” comes not from Thucydides but from Cleon. This speech is, in fact, the one in which the demagogue so admired by Kagan urged his fellow-Athenians to slaughter all the adult males and enslave the women and children of Mytilene, a punishment from which the Athenians themselves shrank. Cleon's apparent horror at the notion that might makes right is, in any case, a disingenuous piece of rhetoric; he was its most outspoken advocate.

Hanson's article is featured in a collection called “An Autumn of War: What America Learned from September 11 and the War on Terrorism,” which Vice-

President Dick Cheney recommended to his entire staff, declaring that it captured his philosophy. Hanson has also met the President and addressed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a certain military swagger tends to color his reading of Thucydides. In his introduction to "The Landmark Thucydides," an amply annotated reprint of a Victorian translation of the History, he sneers at the "veneer of culture" that war inevitably strips away, showing us up "for what we really are." In "Carnage and Culture," his 2001 study arguing that Western warfare is superior to that of all other cultures, he says:

> There is an inherent truth of battle. It is hard to disguise the verdict of the battlefield, and nearly impossible to explain away the dead, or to suggest that abject defeat is somehow victory. . . . To speak of war in any other fashion brings with it a sort of immorality.

And yet the Greeks themselves—not least Thucydides—did speak of war in these other ways. In fact, it is Hanson and Kagan who strip away the moral meaning that underpins Thucydides' account of the war. To get a better sense of what that meaning is, you have to turn from the book that was started in 431 to the play that premièred that spring—which is to say, from history to tragedy.

To an Athenian, at least, Thucydides' History may well have looked more like a tragedy than it does at first to us. The best contemporary evidence for what the ancient Greeks thought of Greek tragedy is Aristotle's Poetics, and it's striking how much of what Thucydides does in his history resembles what Aristotle thought tragedians were supposed to do in their plays. Thucydides' dialogues and speeches, with their emphasis less on factual accuracy than on a kind of psychological truth, conform to Aristotle's view that the best tragic dialogue expresses what a character is most likely to say in a given situation. At one point, Thucydides goes to great lengths to underscore the similarities between his dialogues and those written by dramatists. In the Melian dialogue of Book V—where the Athenians assert that might makes right and that resistance is futile, while the hopelessly outnumbered Melians are forced to put their trust in fate—the author gives his text a remarkable physical resemblance to the script of a play, with the names of the "characters" abbreviated before their respective speeches. It is a chilling dramatic exchange:

> *Mel.:* And how could it be just as good for us to be the slaves as for you to be the masters?
>
> *Ath.:* You, by giving in, would save yourselves from disaster; we, by not destroying you, would be able to profit from you.
>
> *Mel.:* So you would not agree to our being neutral, friends instead of enemies, but allies of neither side?
>
> *Ath.:* No, because it is not so much your hostility that injures us; it is rather the case that, if we were on friendly terms with you, our subjects would regard that as a sign of weakness in us, whereas your hatred is evidence of our power.

Still, Aristotle goes on to say, good dialogue alone doesn't make a tragedy. What makes tragedies feel "tragic" are two plot devices: peripeteia, reversal of fortune, and anagnorisis, a climactic "recognition" of what one hadn't realized before. Thucydides, naturally, couldn't determine his characters' actions—his "plot"—as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides so artfully did. But he did arrange and juxtapose speeches and descriptions of events in such a way as to bring out his story's tragic force.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Thucydides' masterly portrayal of Athens' disastrous Sicilian Expedition as a tragic peripeteia. In tragedy, reversals are usually punishment for hubris, and there are clues, in the History, that Sicily is to be seen as a grand retribution for the policies of which the Melian slaughter stands as the great symbol. The Melian affair closes Book V, and the Sicilian Expedition opens Book VI—a pointed juxtaposition. In Sicily the Athenians are forced, in a typically tragic reversal, to "play" the Melians whom they themselves had destroyed. In their moment of total defeat, Nicias urges his troops to place their trust in "hope," "fortune," and the gods—the very things that the Melians, facing obliteration at the hands of a vastly more powerful enemy, had trusted in, to the derisive amusement of the Athenians during the Melian debate. What befalls the Athenians in Sicily therefore fulfills the desperate prediction of the Melians: "We know that in war fortune sometimes makes the odds more level than could be expected."

This is surely why Thucydides takes special care to present the climactic defeat of the Sicilian campaign, at the Assinarus River in 413, as a theatrical spectacle, with

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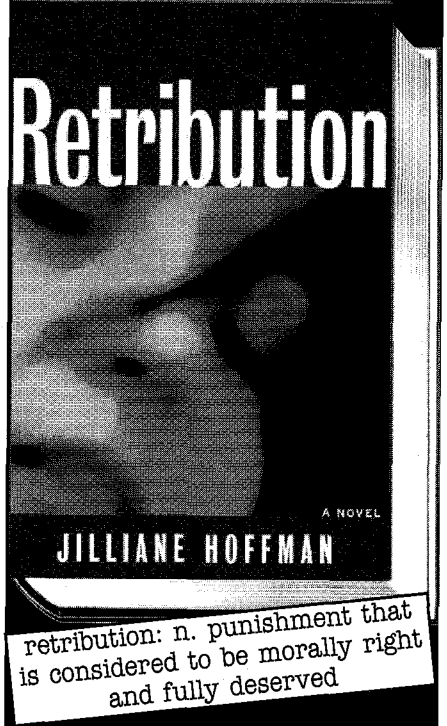

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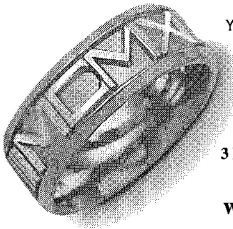

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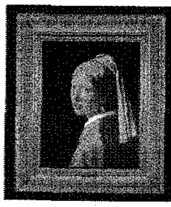

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what can only be described as an audience of Syracusans watching the battle, "prey to the most agonizing and conflicting emotions." How better to behold what the author describes as "the greatest reverse that ever befell an Hellenic army"? The notion of reversal colors the entire passage: the Athenians, who had come across the water to this island greedy to fatten their empire, finish by crawling around in the river mud, desperate to slake their horrendous thirst. "They now suffered very nearly what they had inflicted," Thucydides writes. "They had come to enslave others, and were departing in fear of being enslaved themselves."

But no reversal in Thucydides is more shocking than one that would have been obvious to his contemporaries. In Herodotus' history of the glorious conflict in which Athens and Sparta joined forces to confront the Persian invaders, he relates how the Great King of Persia, confident of his military superiority, tried to persuade the Greeks that resistance was futile; and yet they trusted to hope, and fortune, and the gods, and were richly rewarded in their stunning victories at Marathon, in 490, and Salamis, ten years later. It is an irony as bitter as any you find in Sophocles that the protagonist of Thucydides' History should have come to resemble the villain of Herodotus' Histories. Ancient readers readily grasped this. "Words like these," the first-century B.C. historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote of the Melian Dialogue, "were appropriate to oriental monarchs addressing Greeks, but unfit to be spoken by Athenians to Greeks."

So the lessons to be learned from Thucydides are no different from the ones that the tragic playwrights teach: that the arrogant self can become the abject Other; that failure to bend, to negotiate, inevitably results in terrible fracture; that, because we are only human, our knowledge is merely knowingness, our vision partial rather than whole, and we must tread carefully in the world.

They are, indeed, the lessons of "Medea," that other product of the spring of 431 B.C. To our post-Freudian eyes, "Medea" looks like an over-the-top domestic and psychological drama; to the Athenians, that fraught March, it may well have looked like a political fable. The play's setting is Corinth—a highly unusual locale for a Greek tragedy—and its heroine is obsessed with violated oaths. These two facts suggest an underlying commentary on the Corinthian diplomatic crisis of a few years earlier—an event characterized by broken covenants and explosive confrontations between "kindred" states—which led to the outbreak of the war. Then there's the heroine's philandering husband, Jason the Argonaut. With his aggressive bearing and fancy rhetorical footwork (at one point he tells Medea that he's abandoning her and their children in a strange land for their own good), he begins to look like a parody of a certain kind of Athenian politician—the kind, say, who might for the sake of winning an argument denounce in an enemy the crass ethics that he himself is known to hold dear.

Nearly all Euripides' extant works were written during the war, and, more than any other tragedian, he kept returning to the tragic lessons of history. His "Trojan Women" covers the horrific massacres that followed the Greeks' sack of Troy; it was, not coincidentally, produced a few months after the Melian massacre. The play asks the very question that Victor Davis Hanson considers "immoral": whether abject defeat can yet somehow be a victory.

Euripides' answer is clear. The first great speech of the play is given to the mad Trojan princess Cassandra, and her monologue, recited among the smoking ruins of Troy, is a bizarre paean to the Trojans, for whom she claims a great "victory":

> They died for their own country. So the bodies of all who took the spears were carried home in loving hands,
> Brought, in the land of their fathers, to the embrace of earth
> And buried becomingly as the rite fell due.
> The rest . . .
> Came home to happiness the Achaeans could not know;
> Their wives, their children. . . .
> Though surely the wise man will forever shrink from war,
> Yet if war come, the hero's death will lay a wreath
> Not lustreless on the city. The coward alone brings shame.

The Greek invaders have, by contrast, lost crucial accoutrements of civilized life—family life, burial at the hands of loved ones. Their exercise of absolute power has come at a terrible price.

One definition of "coward," as the play makes clear, is an armed adult male who murders small children. In the play, Cassandra's nephew Astyanax is murdered by the Greeks for the seemingly pragmatic reason that, if allowed to reach adulthood, the young prince might yet avenge his city's downfall. As the child's mother, Andromache, screams in anguish, the Greek envoy addresses her with words that uncannily recall those of the Athenians to the Melians:

> Let it happen this way. It will be wiser in the end.
> Do not fight it. Take your grief as you were born to take it,
> Give up the struggle where your strength is feebleness
> With no force anywhere to help. Listen to me!
> Your city is gone . . . you are in our power.

Physical power, perhaps, but it's clear that there are other powers that need to be appeased. The emotional climax of the play is the pathetic funeral ceremony for Astyanax; it is significant that the same Greek whose arrogance might have reminded the audience of its own emissaries to Melos a few months before is moved to perform the rites himself. This is another kind of reversal, but it comes too late. The Greeks will soon go to their punishments: Agamemnon to be murdered, Odysseus to his terrible wanderings.

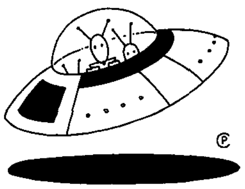
Who, then, are the real victors here? Cassandra's speech suggests that Thucydides' tragic vision, rather than the glib pose of pragmatism, should guide us in examining the moral questions raised by the war about which Kagan and Hanson have written. Like Greek tragic drama, the History is an artful object, a careful manipulation of words and actions that can indeed lead you, if you pay attention, to a clear vision of the truth. (As, for instance, the truth about the real motives behind "wars of liberation.") If you fail to see the connections between tragedy and history, between poetry and politics, you'll miss the point.

Certainly the Athenians thought so. Kagan tells the story of how, when Cleon scored his stunning success at Sphacteria, the rewards granted to him by a grateful city included front-row seats at the theatre of Dionysus—the site of the annual tragic performances, nestled at the base of the Acropolis, that gleaming monument of Athenian civilization at its best. Whether Cleon actually made use of that gift, and, if so, what he thought of the plays he might have seen, Thucydides doesn't say. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Oracle Night, *by Paul Auster (Henry Holt; $23).* A writer recovering from a mysterious life-threatening illness begins to write in a notebook that has, it seems, the supernatural power to draw him into the very story he is writing. And the story, as it happens, is a reworking of Dashiell Hammett's idea about a man who, after nearly dying, flees a comfortable family life. That nothing is what it seems is standard-issue Auster metaphysics, and the narrator here seems familiar, too—literary, Brooklyn-based, decent, if a trifle self-serious. What saves Auster's story from ponderousness is the sheer verve with which he follows his narrator through the labyrinthine plot. He barely has characters, or none more substantial than you'd find in a nineteen-thirties murder mystery, but he shines as a fabulist and tale-teller, putting a high-modernist gloss on noir by leaving his tales within tales within tales unfinished.

Bad Publicity, *by Jeffrey Frank (Simon & Schuster; $22).* In the fall of 1987, Charlie Dingleman, a former congressman, is frittering away his days at a Washington, D.C., law firm, and regretting the divorce that cost him the election. Just as he comes up for a job at the White House, he makes a maladroit comment to a colleague, who swiftly leverages it as an incident of "sexual harassment" to advance her career and destroy his. Frank's prose is as clear and cold as a well-iced Martini, and lets the characters skewer themselves, from sad-sack Dingleman and his baleful nemesis to an overtanned P.R. agent who proudly wears her company's logo—two teeth biting into the globe—and a liberal welfare expert who rolls up the car windows when he drives through blighted neighborhoods. The satire slyly exposes a Beltway world of has-beens and never-wases, where hopefuls scrabble for attention at cocktail parties and an unreturned phone call is a death knell.



Adventures of a Suburban Boy, *by John Boorman (Faber & Faber; $27).* The British director's memoir focusses not on the usual Hollywood dish and score-settling but on his childhood during the London blitz, when he listened for bombs and, more warily, watched his mother pine for his father's best friend, the true love of her life. These memories became material for Boorman's movie "Hope and Glory," and much of his book is a meditation on how film stems from life but also transcends it. (When his mother saw the movie, she was pleased but said, "Personally I prefer a good thriller.") Boorman's pursuit of transcendence has been eclectic, ranging from futuristic ("Zardoz") to backwoods gothic ("Deliverance"), and he records, with self-deprecating wit, the struggle to transform his personal obsessions into filmable stories. His false starts provide insight into the quotidian side of show business: "Like most film-makers, I have spent more time on movies I have not made than on ones that I have."

Bulwer Lytton, *by Leslie Mitchell (Hambledon & London; $34.95).* Today, Edward Bulwer Lytton is most famous for the much ridiculed line "It was a dark and stormy night"—the opening of his 1830 novel "Paul Clifford." Though almost all of his work is out of print, he was in his time a best-selling rival of Dickens and a pioneer in several genres; his œuvre includes historical romances, crime stories, and even science fiction. He was also a strutting dandy who dabbled in the occult and was a successful (if politically eccentric) member of Parliament. Mitchell maintains that "his rehabilitation as an undoubtedly eminent Victorian is long overdue," but this attempt is only intermittently successful. The decision to organize the biography thematically ("A Writer and the Public," "Ghosts and Artists") is ill considered, and its defenses of Lytton's gaudy prose seem strained. Still, it's hard to make the man dull.

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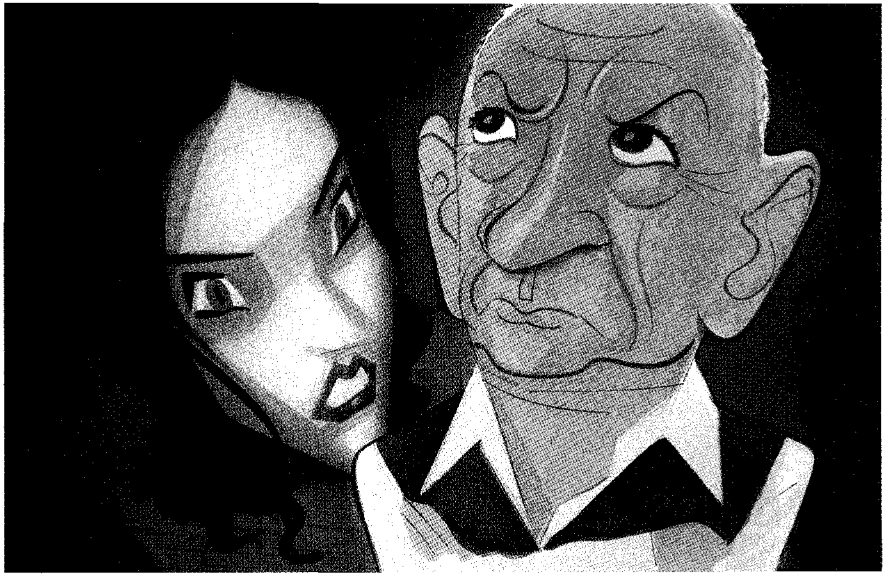
THE CURRENT CINEMA

LIVING IN AMERICA

"House of Sand and Fog" and "The Cooler."

BY DAVID DENBY

There's been some joking over the years about Ben Kingsley's availability as an all-purpose ethnic, ready to play any character requiring a little salt in his accent or a skin tone darker than lily white. But what's not always said is that Kingsley, who is half Indian, takes ethnic impersonation as little more than a starting point: his Gandhi was witty and resourceful as well as saintly, and he was both unsentimental and touching as a Polish Jew in "Schindler's List." In the well-made but despondent new "House of Sand and Fog," adapted from the novel by Andre Dubus III, Kingsley plays an Iranian colonel from the days of the Shah, a proud man living in bitter exile in California. From the opening scenes, you are aware of the performance as a stunt—a conscious tour de force—but Kingsley gives the movie a continuous focus and tension. He's certainly the only entertainment in this noble pool of despair. Massoud Amir Behrani, to give the man his full name, as he insists, struggles to maintain standards for himself. He may work on a road crew during the day and as a clerk in a convenience store at night, but he changes into a perfectly tailored gray suit after each job and returns home to his family at the wheel of an old Mercedes. At a lavish wedding party that he throws for his daughter, he makes a speech in superb English which draws on the traditions of Persian poetry. His daily routine is an elaborate theatrical ritual in which he is the supreme ironic actor and also the chief spectator. He tells himself that everything he does is for the sake of his family, but after a while we realize that it's his own self-esteem that requires him to be a domineering patriarch—rigid, sexually conservative, and disapproving of American informality. Kingsley, who just turned sixty, is in great shape—his carriage is so erect you could drop a plumb line from the back of his bald crown to his heels. As the exiled military officer, he is constantly sizing people up, judging the seriousness of their threat to him, and so one admires Behrani—the eternal refugee, living by his wits—even though he acts with arrogant foolishness again and again.



Jennifer Connelly and Ben Kingsley wage a California real-estate battle.

"House of Sand and Fog" is set in motion by a woman who won't open her mail. Kathy (Jennifer Connelly), a recovering alcoholic whose husband has run off, is lying around her bungalow in a stupor when a bureaucratic error causes her to be thrown out of it. She is incorrectly hit with a tax she doesn't pay or head off, the authorities sell the house at auction, and the Colonel buys it. Hegel said that genuine tragedy is a case not of right against wrong but of right against right—two equally justified ethical principles embodied in people of unchangeable will. On the surface, the movie follows the Hegelian scheme: Kathy wants her house back because it's home, and because it belonged to her father, whom she adored; the Colonel wants the house because its setting—on a hill near the Pacific—reminds him of a property he once owned on the Caspian Sea, and, anyway, he bought it fair and square without knowing of Kathy's troubles The only way such an elemental conflic can end, Hegel said, is with the death o one party or the other.

In "House of Sand and Fog," Kath and the Colonel go at each other furiously, but—this is the non-Hegelian element—they are both fragile reeds in surly, unhelpful American environment The Colonel's puffed-up vanity cause him to face down the barbarians al around him. Kathy, by contrast, is sensitive and decent but not too bright and often short-tempered and reckless; she' the kind of beautiful, messy girl who dumps her troubles onto other people and gets away with it for a while because she's so vulnerable. She uses her helplessness as a come-on, showing up at the house again and again, attempting suicide not once but twice in the same visit. Jennifer Connelly, as always, is intensely sympathetic; she has eyes that could melt a statue, and we have no trouble understanding why a smart police officer (played by Ron Eldard, formerly of "E.R.") falls in love with her and then gets himself into serious trouble as he tries to help her. But understanding is not always the same as enjoyment; the ineluctable downward pull of absolutely everything in this movie is more exasperating than moving.

Struggling to sit through "House of Sand and Fog," one can't block philistine sentiments such as "If the Colonel weren't a stiff and if Kathy were only a little smarter, the entire mess could have een avoided." Exasperation was not art of one's response to the book, since Dubus shifted back and forth between he Colonel's and Kathy's points of view, nd the reader got caught up in the invitable subjectivity of human will. From he outside, however, these misguided people seem inadequate to tragedy.

Dubus also created some life around he two principals, which leads us to an wkward issue. The director of "House of Sand and Fog," Vadim Perelman, is an expatriate himself. He was born in Kiev, grew up in Canada, and moved to Los Angeles, where he made music videos and TV commercials. This is his first feature film. His work is quiet and steady, but, like Jane Campion's recent "In the Cut" and Alejandro González Iñárritu's "21 Grams," Perelman's movie offers a malign and depressive view of life in America—a place where people can discover their souls only though misery and mess. Working with generally good actors, these three foreign directors created small, dense networks of relationships, and their sense of concern comes as a relief in our increasingly anti-humanist commercial cinema, where spangled fantasy is the norm. The trouble is, as talented as these directors are, they don't really get America right. They don't provide a flow of activity around the core relationships; they miss the colloquial ease and humor, the ruffled surfaces of American life. "In the Cut" is set in a paranoid, mouth-of-Hell version of New York, "21 Grams" in a nameless urban and rural wasteland (it's as if the landscape were so fouled it repelled an identity), and this movie, too, rattles angrily in a vacuum. Campion, Iñárritu, and Perelman may be complacent in their own ways. Perhaps they accept tragedy too easily; perhaps they need to work harder to make it seem unavoidable. Dolorousness is becoming a curse in the more ambitious movies made in America by foreign-born directors. We need criticism and satire. We don't need other people's despair.

"The Cooler," which is a bit of an orphan in the Christmas season, is still hanging around town and should be seen by anyone who drinks his whiskey neat. This tough-sentimental genre film feels like a B movie from 1956 with a dirty mouth. The Frank Loesser tune "Luck Be a Lady Tonight" (from "Guys and Dolls") plays on the soundtrack, and the entire movie might be a Las Vegas version of a Damon Runyon tale. It seems that there's this guy Bernie Lootz (William H. Macy), a total loser, whose luck is so bad that a casino owner named Shelly (Alec Baldwin) uses him as a "cooler": no sooner does Bernie join a crap game than anyone on a winning streak starts to lose. Bernie's a very useful person to a man like Shelly. But then the poor bastard falls in love with this young broad Natalie (Maria Bello), a blond cocktail waitress who's also a loser, and, believe it or not, she loves him back. At that point, Bernie's magical powers shift, and people begin *winning* around him. Luck be a lady—that's what the story is about. The trouble is that both Bernie and Natalie are in Shelly's clutches, and Shelly's mood isn't too good. . . .

The writer-director Wayne Kramer cannot be called subtle. Much of "The Cooler" feels casual and slapped together, and Kramer exhibits a film student's glee in using trick shots to pep things up—trick shots that don't actually work. Shelly and the corporate thugs who are part owners of his casino talk in bizarrely overexplicit dialogue—the kind of post-"Sopranos" conversations in which everyone competes to see how many times he can work "fuck" into a single sentence. But the peculiar idiom does have some flavor to it, and Kramer wisely keeps the color scheme harsh and bright—the night tones of Vegas, seen from its underside. This fable is set in sordid casinos and green-walled motel rooms where the sound of a couple fornicating next door is so loud it seems to have been fed through a power amp. The crud and petty desperation of "The Cooler" is enjoyable as atmosphere, and the movie is passionately acted. Macy has his sad, aging boy's face and his touching decency. Alec Baldwin, who has never clicked with the public as a star, and now shrewdly seems to be resigning himself to character roles, gives Shelly a mix of acid intelligence and brutal sentimentality—he weeps over the people he destroys. Maria Bello at times looks like Sharon Stone, at times like Greta Scacchi, but she has a heartrending sweetness of her own. Much of the movie is improbable, and the ending is a shambles, but "The Cooler" embraces B-moviedom with open affection and a total lack of self-consciousness. Sinking down into the pleasant tawdriness, you might even feel nostalgic for an old Times Square grind house with mentholated wafers in the restrooms and a redolent muck of Milk Duds and Jujy Fruits all around you. ♦

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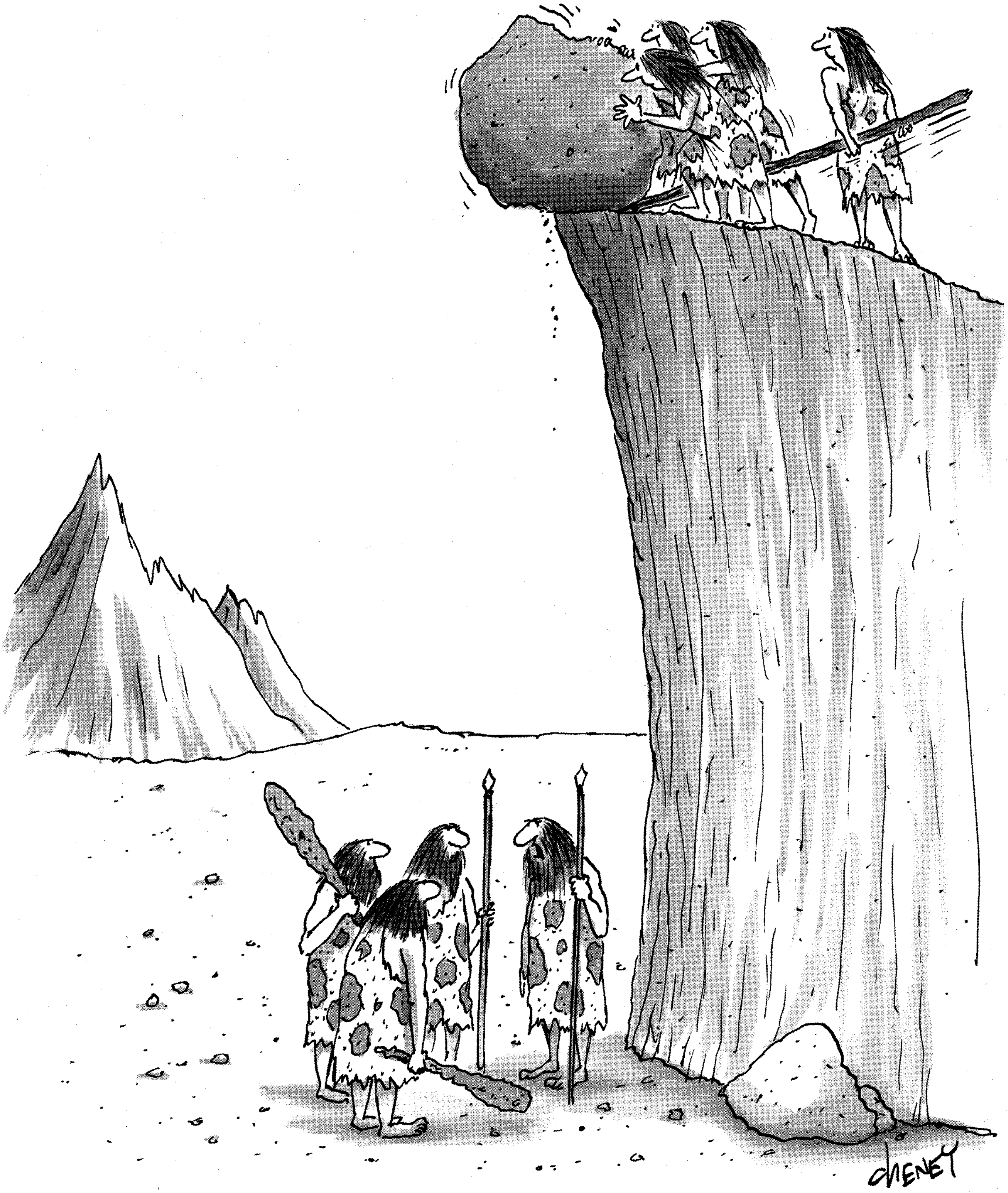
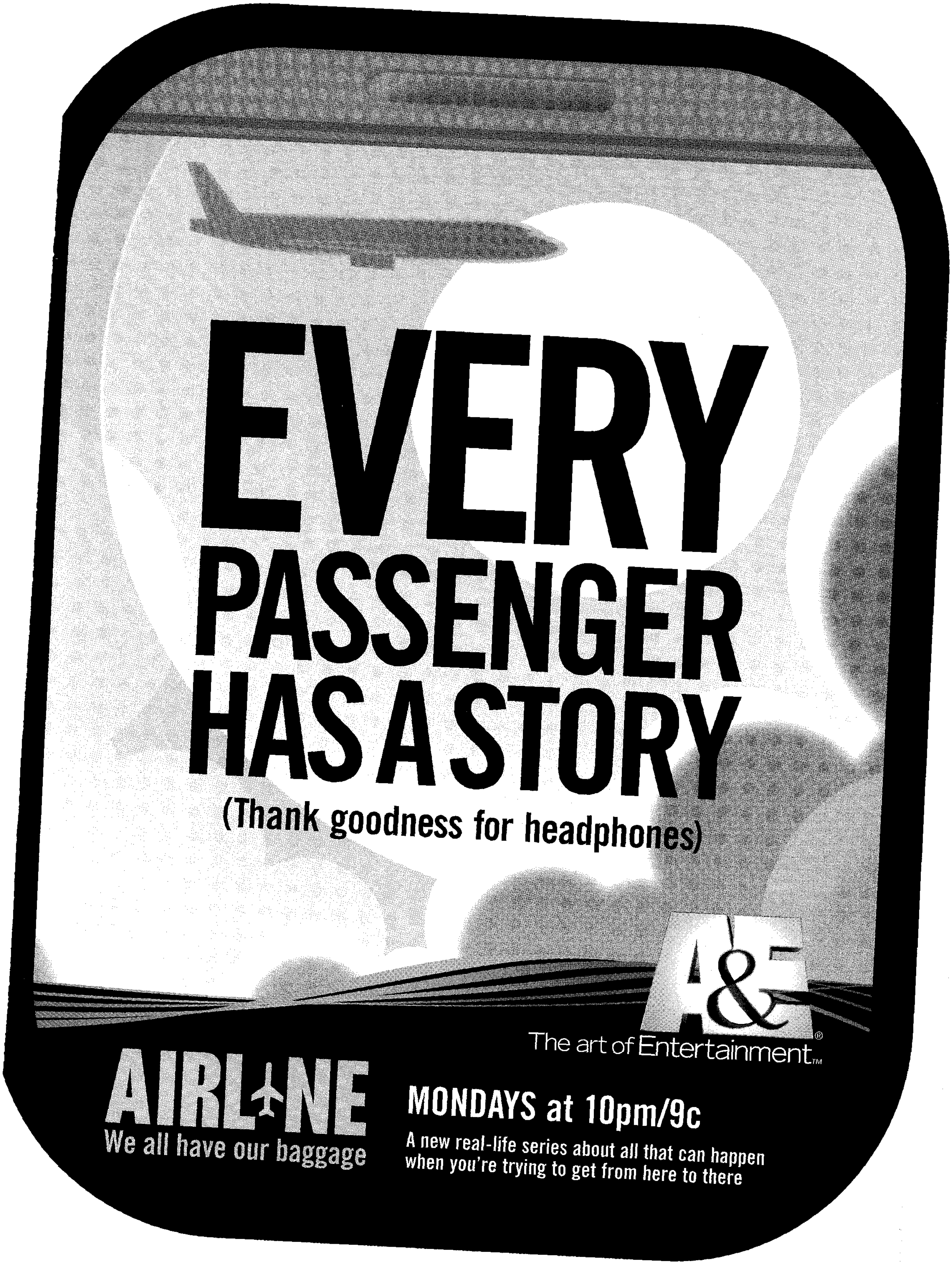


"There've been reports of an increase in chatter among the women."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